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MODERN POETIC DRAMA

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INTRODUCTION

THE writers of poetic drama in the twentieth century are few in number, and their very existence is almost unknown to the ordinary playgoer. The plays of some of these writers are occasionally performed by repertory companies in small theatres, or by amateurs, but the doors of the larger theatres are closed to them, and this fact has its effect upon the type of play that is produced by poets. They write to please themselves, to project their visions upon an imaginary stage, and their plays are not moulded by the desires of their audiences. Critics of to-day mourn over the lack of appreciation of people of to-day and compare the apathy of people of the present age with the Elizabethan ardour for poetic plays. But it is very doubtful whether the tastes of the English audiences have ever changed very materially. They have always loved the melodramatic, the startling, accompanied by highly coloured language, either in verse or in prose. If we look at the popular Elizabethan plays, such as *Tamburlaine*, Tourneur's *Revenger's Tragedy* or *Hamlet*, we see that they have one feature in common, and that is a very strongly marked spectacular element. Murders, ghosts, processions, and duels abound; and the audience was kept on the rack of expectation of some startling and horrifying deed. Its interest was excited still further by splendid and unusual costumes as well as by flamboyant verse. Not for the English stage are the quiet meditative harmonies of such a writer as Racine. *Hamlet*, the supreme type of inward disharmony, would never have been accepted by the English stage but for the clash of events, the dark scenes of murder and excitement he brings with him.

(In the nineteenth century the taste of the audience was materially the same. Amidst the wild medley of theatrical entertainment, the farces, the pantomimes, the acrobatic dis-

plays patronized by Queen Victoria, only a frankly melodramatic verse play, such as Lytton's *Lady of Lyons*, could hope to achieve a great popular success. (Yet poetic drama was not such a homeless waif in the nineteenth century as it is to-day.) Many people felt that something should be done to protect literary drama from the competition of the miscellaneous entertainments, and when Macready, the famous actor of Shakespeare's plays, took on the management of Covent Garden in 1837, he had the help of many influential people. The versatile Lord Lytton, (one of the Commissioners of 1832 which gave a report on the state of the theatre to Parliament) wrote for him *The Lady of Lyons* and *Richelieu*, and Browning wrote his *Strafford* so that Macready might produce it instead of touring America. Browning's play received a moderate success, and was followed, in 1843, by *The Blot on the 'Scutcheon* and Byron's *Manfred* and *Marino Faliero*. At the performance of *Manfred* the theatre was filled to overflowing and the play was received with the greatest enthusiasm. It was Phelps also who encouraged the poetic dramatist, Westland Marston, and produced his plays.)

There was room in the theatrical London of that time for yet another theatre occupied chiefly with Shakespeare's plays, that of Charles Kean. He realized better than Phelps the seductive commercial possibilities of Shakespeare, and his *Midsummer Night's Dream* was an endless succession of pictorial, mechanical and musical effects. He was the first, too, of the Shakespearean producers to realize the stage possibilities of Shakespeare's crowd scenes. His method was to divide his crowd into groups, each of which had a little drama to act, so that variety might be given to the picture. Clement Scott speaks of the extraordinary effectiveness of the crowd scene in *Richard II*, which he witnessed, the movement and chatter of the individual groups, the acrobat and dancers, the imposing entrance of Richard on his horse, the groaning and hoots of the spectators in the crowd and in the balconies, the flowers thrown by admirers, the crowding of the mob round Bolingbroke, the screams of the women and the cries for help, the clashing of the big bells.

By 1865 Charles Kean's management came to an end, but in the 'seventies he was succeeded by Irving, star-actor and manager of the Lyceum. In Irving's theatre the spectacular side was not forgotten, but it was the personality of Irving which was the supreme force in his theatre. Irving supported the cause of nineteenth-century drama by asking Tennyson to write plays for him; he produced *The Cup*, *Queen Mary*, and *Becket*, and made a great success of his presentation of *Becket*. But it was the man and not the play that made the theatrical success, and it is significant that Irving's greatest triumphs were in his presentation of *Hamlet* and *The Bells*, both one-man plays with considerable spectacular attractions.

✓ Verse drama in the nineteenth century, in order to be successful, had to be written in the traditional romantic manner filtered down through the ages from Elizabethan times, and, above all, it had to give good opportunities to the star actor to display his powers. The nineteenth-century idea of acting was essentially that of the one dominant actor thrilling his audience by his presentation of the violent emotions of fear, horror and excitement generally, and by using his personality as a medium through which the play should pass. The tradition runs through Phelps, Macready, Charles Kean, supremely in Irving, and once again in the early twentieth century in Beerbohm Tree. Hence the writer of verse drama for the theatre in the nineteenth century felt bound to keep to the old romantic tradition which gave so much scope to these actors, and he could only strive to get a little freedom in the subject matter of the play. Writers such as Sheridan Knowles (1784-1862) and Westland Marston (1819-90) thought that there might be something in the spirit and the ideas of the age in which they lived which would be worth embodying in drama, but they did not give a new body to new ideas; they clung to the vitiated romanticism of the eighteenth century which derived a thin trickle of life from Elizabethan literature. Westland Marston strives to be original in theme, and in his play, *Life for Life*, he treats of the struggle in a girl's mind

between her duty to her dead father and her love for a man by whose brother her father had been killed. She chooses her love for the living rather than for the dead, and this in a romantic play is a surprise. But the play is set in a Highland glen, in the romantic Scotland of the stage, with its faithful clansmen, its plaids, sporrans, bagpipes, oaths of eternal fealty, wounded warriors and faithful damsels, and all this is expressed in the traditional poetic language which drips into one's ear unheeded. One word is as another, and no single word has value as an individual.

Marston's play, *The Patrician's Daughter*, has a definitely modern subject—the abolishing of class distinctions—for the hero is a man of humble origin who rises to greatness as a politician and is encouraged to marry an earl's daughter. Much of the play is taken up with political conversation, but the lovers' stars are crossed with every kind of romantic absurdity and the play ends with the death of the heroine to these words:

Love! aid me to my chair:
My strength is failing fast; I am as one
Who has striven hard to distance Grief, and gained
The goal before her, my strength but sufficing
To win the triumph. Mordaunt, I shall die,
With thy love for my chaplet, and in peace.

Mordaunt (kneeling by her side): And thou wilt *live* in peace for many years. (*aside*) What demon gives my fear-struck heart the lie?

Mabel: Now take him to your arms and call him son.

Earl: Thou art obeyed—my son!

Mordaunt (advancing) My father!
(*Mabel joins their hands.*)

Mabel: I am happy—very happy!
(*She falls into Mordaunt's arms—a short pause—she dies.*)

This ending, admirably designed to display the ability of the leading actors in extracting tears from a sympathetic audience, contrasts strongly with the political discussions of class against class that we find in the beginning of the play. Marston was a serious minded writer who was trying to

tackle genuine problems in a medium which was out of date and foreign to his mind. Bulwyer Lytton, on the other hand, a man of far more varied ability than Marston, gave himself up joyously to the full swing of the romantic play. In his *Lady of Lyons* the subject is one of class distinction again, but it is not treated in the serious fashion of Marston's play. The love of the gardener's son for the rich and beautiful lady is the romantic theme of many a fairy story. The marriage of the two on false pretences, the disillusionment of the lady on her arrival at the humble cottage, the departure of the hero to the wars, the proposed sacrifice of the lady in marriage for her father's sake in spite of her devotion to her lost husband, her startling rescue by the husband at the last moment, how abandoned in romanticism it all is, and how rich in vigorous life! It is life in an old worn-out medium, but it is hardly serious literature, and it is not probable that its author ever regarded it as such.

✓ The prestige and power of the great actor-manager could make Browning's *Strafford* a success for a few nights, and Tennyson's *Becket* one for a considerable time, but for genuine and prolonged success it was necessary for the poetic play to have great scenic qualities as well as star parts, and it was plays such as *The Lady of Lyons* that were the real theatrical successes. It is the same to-day. Taste in the theatre has changed, acting has become naturalistic, deeds of violence are seldom seen on the stage, and yet a revolution has not taken place in the taste of the English audience. It likes the drawing-room scenes of *The First Mrs. Fraser* and the gay irresponsibility of Noel Coward, but with eager enthusiasm it seeks its romance in other fields. It is in Cochran's revues and in musical comedies that playgoers look for the strange, the romantic, the spectacular. In the cinema and the world of the talkies, realism has made very little headway. In the talkies there seems at the moment to be an inexhaustible demand for the representation of the life of chorus girls, on and off the stage. This topic—a dreary one for those who seek their romance in other forms—undoubtedly has its appeal because of the identification of

the spectator with the chorus girl, and the feeling of relief from the pressure of life which this brings with it. The demand for romance, for the spectacular, for a highly coloured view of life, is still to be found in the ordinary person, and it is largely because this demand is not satisfied in modern plays that the playgoing part of the population is so small.)

In the twentieth century only two poetic dramatists have had great theatrical success, and these were Stephen Phillips in several plays, and Elroy Flecker, after his death, in one play, *Hassan*. The plays of Phillips belonged definitely to the old romantic tradition, and they had theatrical qualities which could be exploited commercially. Beerbohm Tree, the producer, was in the long line of theatrical producers and a follower of Irving. He concentrated on marvellous settings with every kind of subsidiary attraction, such as music and dancing, and gave to the audience the plays expressed through his personality; he saw the acting possibilities of the plays of Phillips, and for that reason produced them. The educated people of his day hailed Phillips as the bringer of a new poetic drama, partly because his verse, harmonious and beautiful in its own way, pleased them after the stilted, pompous writing of Marston and the bombastic, slovenly, writing of Lytton. People in general were delighted with the melodrama, the beautiful scenic effects and the masterly staging.

Hassan, the only other theatrical success amongst the poetic plays written in the twentieth century, succeeded because it was produced primarily as a spectacular entertainment. It was post-War days, and its way was prepared by the enormous popularity of *Chu Chin Chow* and similar pseudo-Eastern productions. The picturesque qualities of the East were exploited to the utmost in the production of *Hassan*, and amongst the actors there was a gathering of stars, the most notable being Henry Ainley. The popularity of *Hassan* showed that a certain type of poetic play could win popularity even in modern times. A poetic play to succeed must still call forth obvious romantic associations, it

must give opportunities for wonderful scenic effects and give scope for the acting powers of popular actors. There is much more in *Hassan* than all this, but the play succeeded, not because of its intrinsic merits, but because of its glittering theatrical qualities. The poetic plays of the twentieth century, with these exceptions, are not known to theatrical audiences because their authors were deliberately trying to break with the old traditions of romantic drama which had caused the same type of play to be written again and again. They wished to evolve a new kind of poetic drama which should be in keeping with the ideas and feelings of a new age both in form and content. There is no doubt that the separation of poets from an outworn romanticism was caused very largely by the influence of the new prose drama which arose in the late nineteenth century and continued its development in the twentieth century. (Romance in prose) drama died hard, for together with the bitter realistic pictures of the narrowness and cruelty of Nonconformist society which we find in the plays of Jones, as in *Saints and Sinners* of 1884, there exist the most extreme romantic improbabilities both of situation and character in the part of the play which deals with the innocent erring maiden and the desperately wicked roué and his machinations. But by degrees melodrama disappeared from prose drama, and by the late 'nineties a kind of uniformity had crept over it. Gone was the exhilarating swing and vigour, the shameless full-blooded absurdities of such a play as *The Silver King*; and *The Silver King*, impossibly remote as it seems to-day from our ways of thinking, was in the main line of tradition of English drama. That is to say, English drama in general is unrestrained, untidy, full of vigour, without the tight line of form, although it sometimes has the inner line of harmony, which Jones himself could not give to his plays. Ibsen, as we know, chained up English drama and bound it to one narrow patch of ground, although indeed it was not Ibsen, but Ibsen's interpreters. Shaw's *Quintessence of Ibsenism* makes surprising reading to-day, because Shaw stood completely outside Ibsen's world. That sense of a

deep inner connection between human beings and their universe, that poetic instinct for the one trait of character, the one word which reveals the whole, Shaw did not perceive in Ibsen's plays, nor did his contemporaries. They took as their pattern the dramatist who wrote of the rights of women, of the wrongs of modern society—the surface Ibsen—and the background of life which looms up in the greatest of Ibsen's plays is cut away, leaving only a villa behind.

We are not wishing for more and more drama written in the style of Robertson or of Lord Lytton or of the romantic Jones. The writing of Shaw or of the Manchester school of dramatists, for example, was stimulating and awoke drama from her mental sloth, distracted her from her sentimental posturings, but it tended to confine the interests of dramatists to a somewhat narrow field—the relationship of man to his social environment. The naturalistic technique, so welcome after the heart-shaking soliloquies of the sentimental school, limited the expression of personality. Life on the stage was tidied up, the confining three walls became more rigid, so that the wind of life could not blow in freely from without. The soliloquy was dead and no fitting substitute for it had been found, so that man could not speak at will as an individual, but was forced to speak with decent reticence as he would amongst strangers. The coming of naturalistic drama killed the old ideal of the poetic dramatist—romantic drama, written in a tradition alien to modern times, that of the pseudo-Elizabethan. Phillips continued to write this drama even in the twentieth century, but he was detached from the world without him, confined within his own sea of troubles. There are also a few minor writers of poetic drama, such as Laurence Binyon, who continue writing in an outworn manner, but the other writers of the century, faced by the new and disturbing naturalistic movement in prose drama, have abandoned the old romantic paths and attempted to create new poetic forms of drama which should express the new age they lived in. Some of these writers tried to bring the bareness and reticence of prose drama into poetic drama, and in wishing for this and attempting it

they were probably mistaken. The scope of poetic drama is essentially different from that of realistic prose drama. The writer of realistic prose drama tries to bring together the various threads of life, to include several groups of people, and to make the connection between the world and our own a close one. There is however another kind of drama, poetic drama, in which the dramatist is trying to pluck his individual from the mass, and set him against the background of life itself. The individual is not controlled by the necessities of his environment, but by some inward law of being. It is the wish of the poetic dramatist not to bring his characters near to us, not to impress upon us the concrete realities of the world, but to distance us from them. He wishes to cut away from us our own familiar world, to deprive us of the pleasure of seeing a replica of it on the stage, so that he may rouse up in us unfamiliar associations, which will serve to detach the individual from his fellows, and make us feel in him the flow of inner life.

CHAPTER I

STEPHEN PHILLIPS

STEPHEN PHILLIPS was the only poetic dramatist in the twentieth century who achieved a great and prolonged theatrical success. From 1900 to 1908 he had five plays produced in London which were so successful, both with audiences fashionable and popular and with critics, that he was for some years one of the best known figures of the theatrical world. He owed much of his success to the fact that his plays were written in the early part of the present century when the last of the long line of actor-producers, Herbert Beerbohm Tree, was at the height of his career, eager to produce modern romantic drama. It is important to remember, when considering the plays of Phillips, that he was in close touch with the tradition of the theatre in the nineteenth century. He was born in 1868, and as a young man he joined the theatrical company of his cousin, Frank Benson. The company of Benson has produced many distinguished actors, but there are certain characteristics of its tradition of acting which mark it as a product of the nineteenth century. Rhetoric is given a high place, each word has its value, and the pace of the play is made very slow in order that the value may be apparent. Although the company has been an excellent training ground for many actors taking minor parts, great prominence has always been given to the actors taking the star parts, and the plays have tended to be one-man plays. In this company stress was placed on the glory of the past rather than on the possibilities of the future.

Phillips acted parts, such as the Ghost in *Hamlet* and Prospero in *The Tempest*, and was particularly successful as the ghost, a part in which rhetoric and good sounding verse

are alone needed. Arthur Waugh says that he was a "stiff actor, moving heavily across the stage, and wearing his costume without ease," and that he spoke blank verse with "a certain sonorous fervour." Very different however was the impression he made upon Coulson Kernahan, who judged Phillips's power as an actor chiefly from the reading of poetry written by Phillips himself. He describes Phillips as "a grave and thoughtful young man . . . with the features of a Greek god," holding an undergraduate audience spell-bound with the music of his voice and the beauty of his poetry. He quotes Phillips as saying at some time "for poetry, high poetry, is the sublimation, the exaltation of the senses into soul," a saying which we feel to be typical of Phillips and, if misleading as to the nature of poetry, enlightening as to the psychology of the writer.

Phillips had ambitions as a writer of plays while he was in Benson's company, and when interviewed by Archer he said that his first play was given to Benson, who kept it for many months, and when he said good-bye at the end of the season, said, "Oh, there's this," and handed back the play without a word more. It was not until many years later, after Phillips's success as a poet, that a play of his was produced. Although Phillips left the stage and for some years earned his living as an army coach, he seems to have valued his past as an actor, and to have been proud of what he learned from his experience. He told Archer of his reading *Herod* to Beerbohm Tree, and of how Tree listened in bored silence until the part of the play was read in which trumpets were heard in the distance. "At that point he sprang from his seat. 'Ha!' he said to the secretary, 'you see the reason of that?'" He asked Phillips if he had ever been on the stage, and as Phillips proudly remarked to Archer, he "divined it at that one touch."

It was at this point that the great partnership between Phillips and Tree began, a partnership which was to give Phillips a fortune and fame, both of which he rapidly lost, and which was to add still more to Tree's theatrical triumphs. Tree as an actor-manager belonged to the traditions of the

nineteenth century. His method in acting resembled that of Irving, the last of his predecessors; that is, he would suspend the business of a play to attract attention to himself, not so much for purposes of self-aggrandizement as because he felt that the audience could only see the real meaning of the play through his interpretation and personality. It did not matter whether Irving was playing *Hamlet* or *The Bells*, he would bend the play according to the needs of his personality and give it back to the audience a changed but a living thing, and Tree followed Irving in regarding a play as merely the setting for his own impressive acting.

Tree also followed the nineteenth-century producers in his concentration on the plays of Shakespeare. In 1897 Tree acquired the management of His Majesty's Theatre, in 1905 he started a series of Shakespearean festivals, and in 1910-11 he had an entire season in which nothing but the plays of Shakespeare were performed. In his method of production he went back in tradition through Irving to Kean, for Kean was the first to present Shakespeare's plays with great magnificence of scenery, dresses and properties, and to consider it necessary to consult museums and picture galleries, in order that the details should be historically correct. Every pictorial aid was sought to make Shakespeare acceptable to the nineteenth century, and Kean made great use of tableaux which illustrated the bare words of Shakespeare's choruses in his historical plays. Irving followed Kean in producing Shakespeare in a very expensive and magnificent setting, and in holding up the action for stage pictures. Tree himself brought the commercialization of Shakespeare to a fine art; he says that he never produced a Shakespeare play without making a considerable amount of money from it. Yet he took his art seriously, and he genuinely wished to make Shakespeare well-known and appreciated amongst large numbers of people. He thought Shakespeare, bare and unadorned, quite unsuitable for modern times; he believed that the play should be rigorously cut in order to make room for the attractive "business" of the stage, and that magnificence of scenery and of stage accessories were neces-

sary if the interest of modern people was to be retained. Yet he had an idea of fidelity in art of which he speaks when he defends his productions in the *Fortnightly Review* of 1900. It is fidelity of scenic effect, not to the text, of which he is speaking. "Accuracy of detail, for the sake of perfect illusion is necessary to us," and, for that reason, if an Egyptian palace or Greek temple is presented, the details must be correct according to the best known authorities of the day. But amongst these minute details, the main theme must be dominant, and so in Tree's productions we have the dim light with the sphinx looming out of it to suggest Egypt, the vague shrieks and noise of things flapping, the figures disappearing in the gloom to suggest the Inferno. Tree was attacking the audience in two ways. He wished to capture its reason by using a faithful reproduction of detail, and its reason he might well have neglected. He wished to capture its emotion, not by using a symbol, but by introducing directly all the associations which the audience might already have with Egypt, for example, dimmed lights, thrummed music, gorgeous clothes. And in this way he was successful in winning the heart of the ordinary man, of the man who craves for romance, but finds it in well-worn paths that his mind is accustomed to tread.

Tree's interests were by no means confined to the past. He was ready to produce any modern play which lent itself to elaborate scenic treatment, and which presented a leading part which he could "interpret" for his ordinary public. Tree's genuine, though somewhat shallow, enthusiasm for Shakespeare, made him the more ready to welcome plays of a romantic character written in well sounding verse, but such plays were not easy to find in an age which was turning to realistic drama. Phillips's training in the old school of acting under Benson, his somewhat superficial sense of the dramatic and his choice of highly romantic subjects, attracted Tree and made him ready to produce Phillips's first acted play, *Herod*, on a large scale.

In all his dramatic work Phillips was attracted by subjects of legend or of history which it is impossible for anyone

to see, simply as stories of the lives of people in the past. He preferred to choose subjects which in our minds are embroidered with layer after layer of rich elaborate colour, the colour of different ages, of different literatures. The Jerusalem of Herod the Great was scenically a subject after Tree's heart, and the opportunity of representing the Orient with all the splendour of several civilizations was not lost by him. The audience was amazed by the magnificence of the Egyptian marble palace with its rich gilding outside, and its mysterious depths within, by the splendour and variety of the dresses, and by the clever way in which Tree (as was his custom) made use of the dramatic possibilities of the crowd. The setting, according to Lady Tree, was called "Prodigious, triumphant, a wonder, a mirage, a noble undertaking."

As to the play itself, *The Times* and the *Fortnightly Review* alike sang its praises. Phillips had made his reputation suddenly by the great popular success of his book of poems in 1898, but his theatrical success was immediate and extraordinary, and in 1902 Walkley refers to him as the public's "Benjamin, their *enfant gaté*." Not alone in the scenic possibilities was the play admirably suited to the genius of Tree, for Herod, the hero, is a man torn by emotion and strident in voicing it. Herod has a passion for his wife, Mariamne, but for reasons of state he murders secretly her younger brother, a rival to the throne. She discovers this in Herod's absence, and when he returns triumphant from his conquests, she refuses to have anything more to do with him. Enraged with jealousy he murders her. We are shown the tortures of his remorse and the madness that it brings with it. Herod stalks through the play like a megalomaniac. When the mob riots he defies them and tells them to strike if they wish:

Here's my breast.

Now strike who wills. Does any hesitate?

The voice of Herod speaks as a voice of the past, as that of

the hero in seventeenth-century heroic drama. The swirl of love and jealousy, the insistence on his extraordinary powers, the bombastic language, the riotous splendour of scenery and accessories are all found in the brief-lived but popular drama of the past. I am not suggesting that Phillips was influenced by the "heroic" drama of Dryden, for its vigour and rush, its bold sweep, its patent absurdity were not qualities which would appeal to his more refined and cautious mind. But, like Dryden, he had a feeling for the effective dramatic situation; and the romantic qualities which attract the audience of the seventeenth century are the same as those which attract the twentieth-century audience.

Phillips's sense of the theatre created a final scene of pathos of which Tree made full use. Herod, his mind unbalanced by grief, returns from self-exile believing that his wife still lives. Only if news of her death is concealed can he be kept from madness. He sends messengers to his wife, but they keep back the truth. Finally the embalmed body of his wife is brought before him, and as he stares at it he passes into a cataleptic fit. "The curtain descends, then rises and it is night with a few stars. It descends and again rises with a glimmer of dawn. He is still rigid staring in a trance on the bier." One can visualize Tree bringing about a great stage success as the curtain falls, and one can admire Phillips for the sense of the theatre he undoubtedly possessed.

The verse itself aroused much admiration. After the tortuous language of Browning's plays, the formal expression of Tennyson's *Queen Mary*, the ease and flow, the spontaneity of the verse of Phillips was a new discovery:

One could not get by heart that sweetness, not
From noon-foam of the Mediterranean
Nor long and leafy Lebanonian sigh
To lone Abanah under Syrian stars.

As seen down a vista of thirty years this kind of verse seems to lack body. Faint perfumes of the writing of past

ages come with it, the words are vague coloured clouds, which pass into each other, since they have no outline of their own. But there is a languorous charm in:

And he shall still that old sob of the sea,
And heal the unhappy fancies of the wind,
And turn the moon from all that hopeless quest.

which is chilled only by the passage of time, and by the print which presents it. It needs a Tree to give it warmth and light, to fill his hearers' minds with radiance.

Four plays of Phillips were produced by Tree—*Herod*, *Ulysses*, *Nero* and *Faust*. Under the influence of Tree's overwhelming personality and the dazzling light of success, the character of Phillips's work changed. The plaintive dreamy melancholy of *Herod*, the idyllic elements of *Paolo and Francesca* are not dominant in Phillips's later Tree plays. It was Tree's wish at all times to make the author as wax within his own hands, and Shaw illustrates this by his description of the perpetual duel that was fought between himself and Tree over the production of *Pygmalion*. Phillips was casual at all times about the finish of his work; by temperament he was profoundly diffident about his poetic abilities, though not superficially so, and his pride in his theatrical knowledge was always lively, so that Tree must have had little difficulty in getting him to write plays which were primarily wonderful scenic productions, and opportunities for the display of acting abilities.

The glories of imperial Rome shone forth in *Nero* (1906); the subject with its dancing girls, its murders at the feast, its sensational love interest, its strident pathos, its almost manic emotion gave Tree an unrivalled opportunity. Lady Tree played the part of Nero's mother, and she gives an impression of the intoxicating success that Tree and Phillips achieved: "Oh the happy days of Nero! How noble, how beautiful the play, how gorgeous the setting, how heavenly the music, how full of excitement and glory the traffic of the stage! . . . the cup of my existence brimmed. The audience brimmed too: we never had a greater financial success."

In *Ulysses* (1902) Phillips attacked a more ambitious subject still. *The Odyssey*, dealing with heroes and supernatural beings, with its scenes in the home of the gods, in the island of an enchantress, in Hades itself, is a subject for opera rather than for drama. Phillips made his subject of manageable size by concentrating on certain episodes, the dispute on Olympus, the grief of Penelope, the parting from Calypso, the scenes in Hades, and the return of Ulysses. Following the dramatic principle of Kean, Tree was careful to ensure that the scenery used was based on the discoveries of the Mycenaean age, and that the advice of authorities of the British Museum should be taken at every point. In the printed edition of *Ulysses* we are told this by Phillips himself and neither he nor Tree seems to have doubted that this would satisfy the desire of the audience for "reality." For as Walkley wrote in his *Times* review of the play Tree was "a man who knows (with Homer) that the unharvested Levantine sea is violent and wine-dark, who knows (with Professor Lethaby) all about 'Mycenaean' architecture, and who knows (with the ingenious producer of Faust at the Lyceum) how the Cimmerian mists of Hades can be adroitly simulated by steam." The austerities of archæological research were, in fact, softened by the emotional music of Coleridge Taylor, and by the romantic interest of the scenery.

The prologue of the play on Olympus with its "amphitheatre of marble hills in a glimmering light of dawn," its dispute amongst the gods, and its rolling thunder was too like a pantomime in its effect to suit Walkley, but the scene in Hades was regarded by him as scenically a triumph. Black barges, Furies, Suicides, Phantoms, and a terrifying Charon, wailing cries and flying shapes formed a Hades full of horror, which Tree surrounded in mystery by keeping the stage very dark. The play was not all spectacle and nothing else; something there is of Phillips's lyrical gift, his expression of the mood of low-toned sadness, the brooding reveries of the man turning his mind within himself to gaze on static beauty there.

Ulysses speaks to Calypso:

I'll drift no more upon the dreary sea.
No yearning have I now, and no desire—
Here would I be at ease upon this isle
Set in the glassy ocean's azure swoon,
With sward of parsley and of violet,
And poplars shivering in a silvery dream,
And smell of cedar sawn, and sandal-wood,
And these low-crying birds that haunt the deep.

Nature is not seen to move with its own life; it is seen reflected as in a mirror.

There is scope also for the gift of Phillips for dealing with a strong emotion, the longing for the something vital which is lacking, in the grief of Penelope for the long absence of her husband. The words fall with a sad hopeless insistence:

Others return, the other husbands, but
Never for me that sail on the sea-line,
Never a sound of oars beneath the moon,
Nor sudden step beside me at midnight:
Never Ulysses! Either he is drowned
Or his bones lie on the mainland in the rain.

But the final meeting of Ulysses and Penelope is not treated dramatically by Phillips. He ceases to be a poet and becomes merely the retired actor, when he leaves it to Tree and his leading actress to bring the play to a close with the stage directions for their divination: "Ulysses and Penelope slowly approach each other across the hall, with rapt gaze hesitatingly. Then she is folded to his breast in silence, while the voice of the Minstrel is heard without, repeating the words of the song from the First Act, and the fire on the hearth which has burnt low throughout the scene, leaps up into sudden brightness."

The subject of *Faust* (1908) gave to Phillips and Tree a great opportunity for summoning up the fantastic and the terrible upon the stage. During the four hours of the performance the audience was taken to a range of mountains between heaven and earth where angels conversed with Mephistopheles, and to the haunt of the witches where

thunder and lightning raged and mountains were shattered; it gazed upon Helen of Troy and Cleopatra and saw the witches across the sky. The play as a whole is merely display, but the love scenes have a kind of pathetic charm, and Phillips was fortunate in having in Henry Ainley as his Faust an actor who understood to perfection the art of speaking verse. But although every beauty of voice must have been given to the words of *Faust*, the ending of the play is an impossible one, and Walkley wrote: "Mr. Ainley drawn up on a diagonal wire is not my idea of a soul wafted through the empyrean."

The most widely known of the plays of Phillips, *Paolo and Francesca*, was famous as printed drama before its performance by Alexander in 1902. It is his best play, and the play in which the theatrical is subordinated to some extent to the poetic. Much more consciously than in his other plays, he is writing in the literary traditions of the past, and from these traditions trying to evolve a new form of poetic drama which should satisfy the feelings of the people of his time. Some of the critics of his play found it closely allied in spirit to the drama of the Greeks, but the likeness is only a superficial one in the dramatic devices he uses. It is from Greek tradition that he takes the blind nurse who foresees disaster at the wedding, and from the same source comes the stychomythia which Phillips uses several times. For example in the scene in which Lucrezia, the sister of Giovanni, tells him that the ill fate his nurse foresaw is the love of his brother for Francesca, the conversational shuttle goes backwards and forwards between them, like a chant, as step by step Giovanni gets nearer to the truth:

Giovanni: Nothing can hold me now.

Lucrezia: Not far to seek

Points back to Rimini, this little town,

To one, perhaps, mad for Francesca's face,

That lurks about us.

Giovanni: Wary now, yet swift!

Lucrezia: Here at our gates, or nearer still.

Giovanni: Say, say!

Lucrezia: Perhaps, perhaps, within this very house.

Giovanni: O barren restless woman, at what sight

Do you give cry at last, . . . etc.

The play deals with the subject, taken from Dante, of the bringing home of a young bride, Francesca, to the elderly husband, Giovanni, by his young brother, Paolo, and of the gradual growth of love between Paolo and Francesca against their will, and of their murder by the enraged husband. It is a sincere attempt to trace the growth of passion in the lovers, and the increase of suspicion in the mind of Giovanni, which leads to the final tragic moment. The first act shows the skill of Phillips as a man of the theatre, for, with no moments wasted and no untidy ends, he places the situation before us, suggests Giovanni's vehement sincere nature, the good feeling of Paolo and the innocence of Francesca. He also uses the first act to hint at the coming disaster, by showing the reluctance of Paolo to stay for the wedding, and by using Lucrezia and the blind nurse as heralds of disaster. To point the way more clearly he even uses the technical device of making Francesca offer a trinket to the nurse, who with a shudder lets it fall.

The difficulties of dealing with the legend are great. In the first place there is no material in the story between the arrival of Francesca as Giovanni's bride and the discovery of their love by Paolo and Francesca in their reading of the story of Launcelot. Phillips has filled in the gap with conversation between the soldiers in the tradition of Elizabethan ribaldry, double distilled by the niceties of his taste. There is also the poison-buying scene with the Elizabethan apothecary, which dramatically is loosely bound to the play.

But the central problem of the play is the presentation of the reading scene in such a way that the abandonment of the lovers shall seem inevitable. A far greater artist than Phillips was at about the same date concerned with the same problem, that is Gabriele D'Annunzio. The jewelled style, the sumptuous sensory imagination of *Francesca da Rimini* has created lovers and a love different in kind from that of the famous prototype in Dante's *Inferno*. Even considered apart

from the constrained passion of that model, D'Annunzio's play is not completely imaginatively satisfying. But a reading of it does reveal the central weakness of Phillips as a writer of passionate drama. For Phillips did not have acute sensuous feelings. His mind was open to many impressions, visual and auditory. He was conscious of beauty in the world, but he saw this beauty through a thin semi-transparent veil which distanced him perpetually from life. The sensuous pleasure of seeing, the sensuous pleasure of hearing, the sensuous pleasure of touch did not burn him as they did D'Annunzio. And it is for this reason that his central scene fails. Phillips can create a general impression that strong emotion of some kind is present, but he cannot particularize, because he feels the world of the senses as in a dream, remotely. And it is partly for this reason that his language is inadequate to express any emotion, except that of a vague yearning or undefined sense of pleasure.

It is this note that we hear:

- Paolo:* Now fades the last
Star to the East: a mystic breathing comes:
And all the leaves once quivered, and were still.
Francesca: It is the first, the faint star of the dawn.
Paolo: So still is it that we might almost hear
The sigh of all the sleepers in the world.
Francesca: And all the rivers running to the sea.

When Phillips comes to the crisis in the scene, the reading of the legend of Launcelot and Guinevere, his lack of style, of the poetic sense which chooses each word because it is the right one, makes the words fail to rouse up in us the associations of power and passion and doom, which the writing of Dante and of the Arthurian romance have already created within us. It is in this crisis that D'Annunzio excels, for, essentially a stylist, he subdues his style, too rich at times, to the kind of simplicity which is needed if these associations are to be called up.

The final scene is well managed dramatically, for the interest of the playgoer is not permitted to subside. There is suspense about the discovery of the lovers, an effective

dénouement, which combines the sentiment of the moderns with the dramatic inventiveness of Tourneur and Webster. The hand that parts the curtain, the call for wedding lights, the appearance of the litter with the bodies are features, theatrically exciting, that we are familiar with from the past.

The last few lines are characteristic of the writing of Phillips:

Giovanni: (going to litter) Not easily have we three come to this—
We three who now are dead. Unwillingly
They loved, unwillingly I slew them. Now
I kiss them on the forehead quietly.
*(He bends over the bodies and kisses them on the forehead.
He is shaken)*

Lucrezia: What ails you now?

Giovanni: She takes away my strength.
I did not know the dead could have such hair.
Hide them. They look like children fast asleep.

There is the sense of the theatre; there is more than this, a sense of the dramatic (with its debt to Webster), but there is also the false touch of emotion in the close: "They look like children fast asleep." It is the wrong phrase, and it confirms one's uneasy suspicion that the Paolo and Francesca of Phillips are but adolescents, with the charm and appeal of adolescents.

Phillips's life was an unhappy and an unsatisfactory one.

Better to leave behind a world to sigh,
Than living fail a world to satisfy

he says in his sonnet to Keats, published in 1913, and Phillips fell rapidly from his great esteem in the literary world. Partly this was due to the fact that Phillips's way of writing belonged to the nineteenth century rather than to the twentieth, and the new generation found itself out of harmony with his way of feeling and his expression, but it is due chiefly to the deep disharmony existing in Phillips's nature, which drove him into a state of obscurity and poverty from which he was finally rescued by his friends, but with his life, as he felt it, broken.

One cannot classify Phillips's poetic and dramatic work as

belonging to periods in his life, for there was no development; the lyrical gift he possessed at the beginning of his life remained unchanged in quality, and the subject-matter of his meditations remained the same:

Sadly, apparently frustrate, life hangs above us,
Cruel, dark, unexplained

he writes in *Lures Immortal*, of 1913. In the poem he describes the various beauties of nature, the beauty of woman and of man's deeds, and speaks—

Of the sea, that soul of a poet a-yearn for expression
For ever yearning in vain.

This yearning after beauty in general, this diffused sensitivity to a melancholy charm of nature, this union of the poet's mood with the object, without the power of detachment—that is of seeing the object with its new identity as a part of a work of art—is found in the adolescent whether he is a poet or not. And in the end of the poem Phillips turns to the consolation of the romantic, æsthetic-minded adolescent:

And last, and grandest, the lure, the invitation,
And sacred wooing of Death;
Unto what regions, or heavens, or solemn spaces,
Who, but by dying, can tell?

The attraction of death is a subject to which Phillips returns continually in this volume, and in the poems of 1898, which first made his reputation, he is absorbed in the subject, in such poems as *Lazarus*, *The Wife*, *Faith*, etc. In his famous poem *Christ in Hades*, Phillips does not let Christ bring light and radiance to the dead. The "melancholy" attraction of Jesus is felt, the atmosphere of the dead flows over him in waves as "the tall dead stood drooping around Christ." Even in the beautiful poem *By the Sea*, in which love for the woman and for the sea are as one, the death note must sound again:

And a new glory was on land and sea,
And the moist evening fallow, richly dark,
Sent up to us the odour cold of sleep,
The infinite sweet of death.

It is the luxuriance of melancholy, the sense of abandonment to sorrow and to the arms of death, which Phillips excels in portraying. The peculiar lyrical power of Phillips is best found in *The Gleam*, a poem on the death of his infant daughter, or in *The Parting of Launcelot and Guinevere*:

But those that stood around could scarce endure
To see the dolour of these two, for he
Swooned in his burning armour to her face,
And both cried out as at the touch of spears:
And as two trees at midnight, when the breeze
Comes over them, now to each other bend,
And now withdraw; so mournfully these two
Still drooped together and still drew apart.
Then like one dead her ladies bore away
The heavy queen, and Launcelot went out
And through a forest weeping rode all night.

It is the Morte d'Arthur seen in the melancholy reflection of a lake, and how admirably does Malory's word "dolour," typical of the 'nineties, express the atmosphere of decaying woods, of hopeless sorrow without cause, of grey melancholy, which was Phillips's prevailing mood.

The feelings that oppress the sensitive and romantic adolescent, the sense of a crushing power without, the flow of ineffective emotions, the preoccupation with the idea of death, all these are found in *Paolo and Francesca* as in *Herod*, and it is the fact that this mood is not cast off by the lovers in an abandonment of joy which gives the play, in spite of its charm and brilliance, a dominant impression of unfulfilment. Do what he will, Phillips cannot tear off the shroud of melancholy from his lovers; they are not fated lovers dying exultant as are Romeo and Juliet; they are sad appealing victims of a crushing power, who have not succeeded in bursting into life and freedom for their one moment.

Although Phillips's greatest triumphs were won by plays full of action and scenic display, his deliberate intention was to keep away from Elizabethan models and to follow the Greeks and the French tragedians. To Archer he urged the necessity for a "deliberate rebellion against the Elizabethan

tradition," and he continues, "I seek after unity of effect where the Elizabethans sought after multiplicity." It is difficult to see exactly what attracted Phillips in classical drama, unless it was that he saw in the classical form an opportunity for expressing in a simple medium lyrical emotions. He says to Archer: "Is there not such a thing as large and simple character? Must it be always subtle and complex? And is character the only element in drama? Do not action and passion count for something? The Greeks thought they did; Corneille thought so, and Racine . . ." Phillips's essentially subjective kind of writing is far from that of the French tragedians, as from the Greeks, but he was conscious of his lack of interest in individual differences of character, while his theatrical training made him eager to express himself in drama. In their theatrical effectiveness the Tree plays of Phillips are written after English models, and not after classical ones, and it is not until the days of his obscurity that he simplifies his technique to deal with an emotional issue.

There are certain plays which Phillips clearly wrote for his own pleasure rather than for theatrical demands. These plays are *Paolo and Francesca* (1900), *The Sin of David* (1904), *Pietro of Siena* (1908), *The King* (1912). The theme of the plays is basically the same, that is to say the hero and heroine are lovers, but there is some moral law which forbids their happiness in their love. Phillips's heroines are not taken from life, for to Phillips life must necessarily be something quite separate from art, and art for him was an escape to a pure shut-in region away from the turmoil, the distresses of a life which seemed to him without plan. The heroines of Phillips, his Francesca, Miriam, Gemma, are all pure women who give to the abstract quality of purity a fantastic value. In *Paolo and Francesca* there is a compromise between the principle of purity and the demands of life, and though the lovers are not freed completely to live their own life in the play, the fact that there is a compromise gives the play greater value. *The Sin of David* was a theme which much attracted Phillips. He told Archer that he wished to dramatize the Biblical subject, but since this would have been forbidden by

the censor, he was forced to translate it into a story of the Civil War in England. Mardyke is a colonel of the Parliamentary army, an old man married to a young girl, Miriam, to whom he is harsh and unkind. The play opens with the trial for seduction of a young lieutenant of the army and his condemnation by Sir Hubert Lisle, commander of the army, who arrives at Mardyke's house on the day of the trial. Miriam and Lisle fall in love, and Lisle sends Mardyke on a military expedition which he knows will end fatally for him. The last act takes place five years later, when Miriam and Lisle are talking about their son. He is seized with a mysterious illness, which Lisle knows is sent as a punishment for his sin, and the child dies. Miriam, desperate, wishes to leave Lisle, but he persuades her that punishment has been sent because their marriage has been sensual, and not spiritual, and that they must live together henceforth in a spiritual marriage:

Our former marriage, though by holy bell
And melody of lifted voices blest,
Was yet in madness of the blood conceived,
And born of murder: therefore is the child
Withdrawn, that we might feel the sting of flesh
Corruptible; yet in that withdrawal,
Folded upon the bosom of the Father,
Hath joined us in a marriage everlasting,
Marriage at last of spirit, not of sense,
Whose ritual is memory and repentance,
Whose sacrament this deep and mutual wound,
Whose covenant the all that might have been.

It is the theme of the struggle between the flesh and the spirit, and the victory of the spirit, the theme of the inevitable punishment for sexual crime which attracts Phillips, but though the scenes of the love between Lisle and Miriam have a certain hot-house charm, how intolerably mawkish are the scenes in which the parents talk of their prattling child and in which they cast away their former marriage.

It is remarkable in view of Phillips's objection against plays written on the Elizabethan model, that in *Pietro of*

Siena and *The King* he should choose subjects and situations directly from Elizabethan plays. *Pietro of Siena* is strongly reminiscent of *Measure for Measure*, since the central situation is the called-for sacrifice of her honour by the heroic Gemma in order to save her brother's life. The brother's horrified reaction against death is taken from Shakespeare's play, except that its expression is commonplace and slipshod with the inevitable allusions to Chanticleer, the rose's red bosom, nature sighing, and the picture of the labourer's young wife at her toil. But Luigi, the brother, does not know of the sacrifice his sister is said to have made, and when he is released he repudiates his sister with horror and says:

You, whose very tears were holy water, her blood
The very wine we drink not if we sin . . .
You, Gemma, though some may applaud the act,
I loathe you for it, and for evermore.

The central situation in which Gemma offers herself to Pietro, coldly assuring him of her hatred, and Pietro's realization that her love is necessary to him, is dramatically well managed, and is psychologically a subject with possibilities, but the announcing of the coming marriage to the wondering populace, Luigi's attitude, and Pietro's speeches of conversion remind one dangerously of *Pamela*. The truth is that the situation of *Measure for Measure* is modified not so much for purposes of psychological interest, or to conciliate modern tastes, but because, for the part of Phillips which devoted itself to literature, women must be pure at all costs, and must have the attitude which the old nurse ascribes to the heroine:

She hath been so gentle to these sinners, yet
Sick with abhorrence but to think their sin.

The King, although Phillips consciously wrote it on Greek models, is like in subject to *'Tis Pity She's a Whore*, written by Ford, the late Elizabethan, though in Phillips's play Don Carlos is the lover of Christina, and the father of her unborn child, without their knowing that they are brother and sister. The likeness is not alone in subject; there are the same

luxuriant melancholy and dark swooning emotions in both plays. Phillips's gift for expressing strong emotion is at its best in the austere framework of the play, in which he displays the shock of horror which overcomes the king and the lovers when they discover the truth, the sad farewell of the lovers before their suicide, and the restrained grief of the king as he shoulders once more the cares of the state. The sad hopeless melancholy of the lover, Don Carlos, reminds one again of the lyrics of Phillips:

Why, you encircle me as doth the air,
And nothing breathes or moves apart from you.
The universe hath got from you a soul;
Since first I saw you on a fated night,
From the dark palace casement secretly,
Leaning with loosened hair to midnight-lilies
O then more solemn grew the woods, the hills
More strange, the mere more perilous still,
More lone the bird, returning in red light.

The lover is enclosed again, enclosed in his uterine walls, with no movement, no breath apart from his beloved one; there alone in darkness does he find happiness.

Phillips felt his life to be a life of tragedy. His youth was a difficult and discouraging time; later he gained a position of great fame suddenly, and lost it as suddenly, living a life of obscurity and poverty for some years. After his return to ordinary life he became editor of *The Poetry Review*, and published various poems and plays, including *The King*, and produced on the stage, with Martin Harvey in the chief part, a war melodrama of the worst type, *Armageddon*. But when he writes of poetic drama in *The Poetry Review*, a journal that he edited at the end of his life, he writes as one who has retired from the struggle of authorship, as one whose dreams of greatness are over. There is virtue in Phillips's work, both lyrical and dramatic, there is genuine poetic ability, but yet he failed to achieve very much. This was because unhappiness possessed him, because it was necessary for him to make his life and art two separate things. Apart from his poetic ideas it is probable that his actual daily life had little meaning

to him, and that he lived as in a dream searching for experience in life and finding no reality or vivid experience anywhere, whatever kind of life he lived, either in ordinary society or in the obscure life of the slum. In *The New De Profundis* he writes of the central trouble of his life—his feeling that his mind is torn by some invisible indefinable emotional conflict, so that life outside his own mind is merely a dream life, a far-off vision seen in a mirror, and beautiful sights and sounds are only to him faint shadows of their real selves:

I am discouraged by the street,
The pacing of monotonous feet;
Faces of all emotion purged;
From nothing unto nothing urged;
The living men that shadows go,
A vain procession to and fro.
The earth an unreal course doth run,
Haunted by a phantasmal sun.

Thou didst create me keen and bright,
Of hearing exquisite and sight.
Look on thy creature, muffled, furled,
That hast no glory in thy world,
In odours that like arrows dart,
Beauty that overwhelms the heart.
I neither hear, nor smell, nor see,
But only glide perpetually.

Life became a dream to Phillips, and from a dream, literature cannot obtain perpetual life. His poems and his dramas faint for lack of fresh stores of life, and the mood of beauty which is in them is the mood of darkness, of melancholy, of the man perpetually cut off from the source of life and seeking it in a trance.

CHAPTER II

JAMES ELROY FLECKER

THE dramatic work of Flecker, so different from that of Stephen Phillips, is associated with his because *Hassan* is the only other poetic drama of the twentieth century to attain to success both with audiences and with critics. The play is mainly written in prose but the prose is poetic, and *Hassan* can only be regarded as a poetic play. Like the plays of Phillips, *Hassan* was produced at His Majesty's, though after the death of Tree, and with splendour of scenery, music and dancing. It was performed with music of Delius as an accompaniment and with Henry Ainley in the chief part. The play was accepted by Basil Dean for performance in 1914 shortly before the death of Flecker, but, because of War conditions, it was not produced until 1920.

James Elroy Flecker was born in 1884, the eldest child of a schoolmaster. He had a public school education of the ordinary classical kind. Although Flecker criticized English education in his pamphlet, *The Grecians*, on the whole he fitted well into his school environment and seemed a somewhat ordinary type of clever boy with a gift for easy versification. At Oxford he was known as a brilliant conversationalist with a fantastic wit, and he became one of the centres of the young æsthetes of the day. The interest of the young intellectual group in Oxford was centred in the literature of the 'nineties, in the æsthetic doctrines of Pater and of Wilde, and in the fierce revolutionary spirit of John Davidson.

Flecker's connection with this Oxford group even caused some anxiety in his home, where his mother, especially, was an ardent evangelical. There is a letter published from his mother to Flecker, protesting against his ideas of bringing

his friends home with him, for she feared that they might pervert his sisters by their loose-thinking ways. After much earnest correspondence with his parents and elderly friends, Flecker declared himself an agnostic, although during his fatal illness he turned back to the Church. But although Flecker may have alarmed his parents at times, and although he undoubtedly liked to think of himself as the brilliant leader of an æsthetic group, yet his relationship with his family was always a most intimate and dependent one, and he prided himself also on being an ordinary, typical Englishman. Francis Birrell, his close friend at Cambridge, writes: "To my mind he was essentially *rangé*, the type of excellent husband and father," and speaking of his conventional attitude to the War: "It was his British qualities coming out, something solid, almost commonplace."

Flecker decided that he would enter the consular service, his deep interest in the literature and languages of the East attracting him to this idea. He entered Cambridge in order to study eastern languages, but in spite of his friends Rupert Brooke, Arthur Waley and Francis Birrell, he found Cambridge life uncongenial to him. In 1910 he was appointed Vice-Consul in Constantinople, and for the next three years, apart from six months' leave in England, he lived in various places in the East, including Smyrna and Beyrout, marrying in 1911 a Greek lady. The last eighteen months of his life he spent in Switzerland, suffering from tuberculosis.

Flecker desired to visit the East, and in the East he lived for several years, but though he felt its fascination he was at the same time repelled by it, and soon began to long to return to England to live. Partly this was caused by the illness which first attacked him at Constantinople and from which he never wholly recovered, but it was chiefly caused by the fundamentally English nature of his character. His wife mentions in her memoir of Flecker that, even when he was well, he longed for his Oxford friends and he always seemed to be conscious of the fact that he was an alien. Unlike his friend, Colonel Lawrence, he saw the East not from the inside but from the outside. He wrote to Savery in

1913: "I loathe the East and the Easterns, and spent all my time there dreaming of Oxford. Yet it seems even to hardened Orientalists that I understand." In the same letter he remarks, somewhat defiantly, that the proper attitude of the Englishman towards the Oriental is that of laughter, by which he means that identification of interest of East and West is impossible, and the Westerner must always look at the East as at a show and a spectacle. Yet Flecker's residence in the East was of the greatest importance to his art, and had the effect upon him of suddenly maturing his poetic powers. Flecker had considerable insight into the nature of his own gifts and he knew that his art should be objective and not subjective. In his Preface to *The Golden Journey to Samarkand* Flecker says that his ideals in poetry are those of the French Parnassian. The Parnassian uses traditional forms and even classical subjects: "His desire in writing poetry is to create beauty: his inclination is toward a beauty somewhat statuesque. He is apt to be dramatic and objective rather than intimate." To Flecker the diffuseness of Massfield, the didacticism of Wordsworth were equally abhorrent. He felt dissatisfied with the whole bulk of modern poetry; for him the primary duty of the artist was to keep his eye on the object.

The appeal of the Parnassian to Flecker is easy to understand, for Flecker was at all times a pure visualist. If we examine *The Gates of Damascus* or *Brumana* we find that the imagery is visual throughout the poems:

"The dragon green, the luminous, the dark, the serpent-haunted sea."

"The sun who flashes through the head and paints the shadows green and red."

"And all around the snowy mountains swim
Like mighty swans afloat in heaven's pool."

Flecker was certainly a visualist, and possibly also had eidetic vision. His wife tells us of the effect that the sight of beautiful things had upon him; he would look for a very short time and then either comment on what he saw, or else, apparently, lock it up in his mind and contemplate it there.

The effect of the East on Flecker was to strengthen his power as a visualist, his power of creating in his poems solid blocks of brilliantly coloured form. As we read Flecker's Eastern poems the earth glows and shines before us, our minds are filled with clear-cut images: form and thought are at one. We feel that the universe has ceased to be indefinable, confusion is gone and every object of beauty in the world stands out sharply defined. The East of Flecker is not the East of immortal longings; it is the East of *The Arabian Nights*, in which the extravagant is made believable by the vividness of the detail. Flecker, steeped in these legends, comes to the East and finds the brilliant sky, the vivid colours, the feeling for beauty, the cruelty he has seen reflected in its literature, in the world before him.

The discovery of the East heightened all Flecker's gifts as a poet and confirmed him as a Parnassian; but Flecker was not wholly objective and Parnassian, he was also to some extent a Romantic, for his nature was a divided one. Born in a clerical family, bound to his parents throughout his life by ties abnormally strong, Flecker seems to have had before his mind as an ideal the "healthy manliness of Kingsley," which he praises in one of his letters written at the age of eighteen.

We do not mean that he set before himself the ideal of a Sunday-school teacher, for he was known amongst his friends for his gifts, amongst other conversational ones, for being a ribald wit. But it is certain that the Parnassian ideal of being "dramatic and objective rather than intimate" appealed to him not only because as a visualist this way of writing presented the greatest measure of artistic truth. It also attracted him because it seemed a way of escape from the "gross and irrelevant egoism" of Victor Hugo, as he described it. He clung to the Parnassian path because he feared self-expression, he feared that if he did not strictly confine himself he would turn to gross egoism, like that of Victor Hugo, or to didacticism like that of Wordsworth. He feared moreover that his "healthy manliness" might fade away, and that his divided soul might be revealed. In *Hassan* it is revealed, for

in *Hassan* we find the hand of the Parnassian and of the Romantic; we find an imperfect amalgamation of different elements in a play, the texture of which is solid and brilliant.

There is a remarkable contrast between the attitudes of Flecker and of Phillips to a scene. Phillips sees it vaguely through an atmosphere shed by the emotional life of the characters; sense-impressions are faint and fade into one another. Flecker's scenes glitter with a hard and brilliant light, with no shadows, and as you read them you have a feeling that you can pick up the scenes as you can a jewel. *Hassan* was presented with all the magnificence that is traditional at His Majesty's, the tradition which produced *Herod*, *Chu Chin Chow* and *Hassan* with almost equal magnificence. But there is so much body and so much light in the scenes of *Hassan* that there is a feeling that this crowding of the stage with dancing girls, processions and gorgeous clothes, serves rather to obscure than to enhance it.

The play *Hassan* has as its hero a fat elderly maker of sweetmeats in Baghdad, who is also a poet. He loves a beautiful widow, Yasmin, and to win her heart sends her a magic draught in a sweetmeat. She laughs at him and he feels his heart to be broken and falls insensible. The Caliph in search of adventure goes up to a mysterious house, and Ishak, the court poet, for the sake of a brief holiday, sends up the insensible Hassan instead of going to the house himself. The Caliph finds himself in the house of The King of the Beggars, Rafi, who has sworn to inflict a living death upon the Caliph because he has captured his mistress, Pervaneh. Hassan secures the escape of the Caliph and is rewarded by a gift of a beautiful house in his grounds. Rafi is captured and he and Pervaneh are given their choice either to live, in which case Rafi is to go free and Pervaneh be the mistress of the Caliph, or else to have one night of love and die with horrible torture together. The lovers choose death, and Hassan is forced to watch their tortures. Ishak finds him nearly mad with horror and persuades him to go with the caravans to Samarkand, leaving behind them cruelty and the Caliph, seeking the beauty which Hassan now only finds in the design of his carpet.

The first two acts best show forth Flecker's powers as a dramatist; action is crowded into them but they remain clear. These acts express incongruity, violent contrasts, the macabre; they are witty and they dazzle with images. Incongruity is properly the property of comedy, and in the first act we have a contrast between the violence of Hassan's passion for Yasmin and the commonplace nature of his absurd body. Hassan is changed to a rapturous spirit by his supposed acceptance by Yasmin, and turned into a grovelling body by her savage rejection. The scene veers in fact between tragedy and comedy.

The right atmosphere of unsentimentality is created by the kind of images that Flecker uses. Yasmin's body is not described in the spiritual style of a lover romanticising the object of his love. Yasmin asks:

Are not my lips two rubies drenched in blood?

and an image of voluptuous burning fire comes before our eyes. Her body is described by Selim in the Eastern style: "The silver hills with their pomegranate groves; or the deep fountain in the swelling plain, or the Ethiopian who waters the roses in the garden, or the great lamp between the columns where the incense of love is burned." There the sensuous reality is only slightly veiled by the allegory, and the world of love is kept to the concrete.

The fact that Flecker is almost wholly visual is shown especially in the description of the sweets that Hassan makes for Yasmin: "I will make her sweets like globes of crystal, like cubes of jade, like polygons of ruby. I will make her sweets like flowers. Great red roses, passionate carnations, raying daisies, violets and curly hyacinths." How admirable are these sweets for the imaginative vision, and how unseductive for the imaginative taste! One thinks of the "Jellies soother than the creamy curd" of a poet whose imagery was not merely visual, and pictures Hassan himself as having no real appreciation of the confectioner's art.

The second act of *Hassan* is written in the same spirit as the first. It is neither tragedy nor comedy; the elements of both are present but the scene in which the King of the

Beggars entertains the Caliph is written in the spirit of the fantastic Eastern tale, in which surprise follows surprise, and incongruity is the architectural principle. The Caliph is powerless at the hands of the Beggar King, dancing beggars appear instead of the expected beautiful dancing girls, the beggars reveal themselves as men of beauty of person and dress, Hassan, the confectioner, is dressed as a prince, the Caliph and his followers suddenly imprisoned in an iron cage. And, as in the Eastern story, we have a tale within a tale, and how admirably told it is with its moment of crisis: "But at that moment there entered the market a negro eunuch, so tall and so disgusting that the sun was darkened, and the birds whistled for terror in the trees." Flecker turns this Eastern hyperbole to a use which is both comic and terrifying; in fact he understands the use of the macabre.

But a new note appears in this scene. It is cruelty, and it is the kind of cruelty which is sometimes found closely allied to a feeling for beauty. The King of the Beggars promises a terrible death to the Caliph: "But as for the Peacock of Peacocks, that sack of debauch, that Caliph, alive in his coffin, I and none other will nail him down, with his eyes staring into mine," and following upon this threat come the associations of beauty round the Caliph's name: "His great sealed boxes bursting with unbeaten gold, and his beads of amethyst, and his bracelets of sapphire; all this and all his women, his chosen flower-like women." This alliance between cruelty and beauty, between cruelty and love is one of the predominating features of *Hassan* as a play, but up to this point it is not stressed; it is part of the sinister and brilliant atmosphere of the scene of the "House of the Moving Walls."

The Flecker of the first two acts is the Flecker of the poems with his powers heightened in the new medium of drama, but the Flecker of the last two acts is the Romantic struggling with the Parnassian. A new spirit is shown in the depiction of the love of Pervaneh for Rafi. Flecker's skill in dramatic condensation is still remarkable both in the scene of the lovers' choice between love and torture, separation

and life, and the scene in which the choice is made. But the weakness in each scene is the same; at the highest moment of dramatic excitement—the ecstasy of Pervaneh—we feel that the emotion and its expression are unreal. We listen to Pervaneh speaking: "But we have heard the Trumpets of Reality that drown the vain din of the Thing that Seems. We have walked with the Friend of Friends in the Garden of the Stars, and He is pitiable to poor lovers who are pierced by the arrows of this ghostly world. Your lips are the only lips, my lover, your eyes the only eyes—and all the other eyes but phantom lights that glitter in the mist of dream." The thinness of this kind of writing is very apparent when we turn to the solidity of the passage of horror in the same scene: "There is only one thought that can haunt me—the thought of a coffin closing on open eyes, the sway of the coffin carried to the grave, the crash at the bottom of the pit, the rumble of the earth on the lid, the gasping for breath and light." For only certain aspects of the East did Flecker understand. Its fatalistic mysticism in the Fourth Gate of the *Four Gates of Samarkand* is translated into the gentle pietism of his own upbringing, and the same criticism may be made of the mysticism of Pervaneh. And love for Flecker the artist, meant desire with its longing for the "two rubies drenched in blood," desire the reverse side of which, for Flecker, is cruelty.

In the prison scene between the lovers Pervaneh is still ecstatic, still remote from life as Flecker, and as Rafi, felt it to be. Pervaneh chooses death, because Rafi to her is "one with the Eternal Lover, the Friend of all the World." Rafi longs for life, for the sight of his home; he has an acute realisation of the horrors of torture as well as of the concrete physical delights of life: "You do not see, you have never heard the high, thin shriek of the tortured, you have not seen the shape of their bodies when they are cast into the ditch." The lovers decide to die, Rafi for love itself, but Pervaneh for some idea behind it. The love of Pervaneh is love seen by the romantic side of Flecker, a love unreal and idealized which is divorced from the body. To the Parnas-

sian, the spirit world is faint and indefinite, and there is no outline or colour. Outline and colour are for Flecker, the Parnassian, as for Flecker the poet, life itself. Flecker himself was conscious of the weakness of the romantic side of the play, for in 1913 he wrote to Savery: "Pervaneh is philosophising. I tried to make it ecstatic—but it's as preachy as Bernard Shaw. But again she is rather a cold fine woman."

The Procession of Protracted Death with its instruments of torture, its negro executioner, its lovers chained to a cart on which lie their coffins, is a return from romanticism to a sexually-desiring sadistic world. Hassan is forced to watch the torture by the Caliph and gives to us dreadful details as he faints. Yasmin laughs as she contemplates the torture and speaks of it to the executioner: "I laughed to see them writhe—I laughed, I laughed, as I watched behind the curtain. Why did you drink his veins?" and the executioner carries her off in his arms. The fountain runs red with blood, and the poor romantic ghosts feel even memory slip from them, for as the Ghost of the Fountain says, they were too spiritual. Only the Ghost of the Fountain remains, for he clung to reality in life: "I loved the veins of the leaves, the shapes of crawling beasts, the puddle in the road, the feel of wood and stone."

There remains one romanticist, and he is Hassan. Hassan, the hero, is like Flecker himself, a man questioning beauty and love. Hassan is not a refined sadist as is the Caliph, who does not wish to observe torture but to take his pleasure in the thought of it, but he is both attracted and repelled by cruelty. The love of Hassan for Yasmin has its elements of cruelty: "Do I love you?—then love shall drive the blade in deep." Flecker's original intention was to make Hassan whip Yasmin, but, as he naively remarks to Savery, this would have seemed too sadistic. Hassan and Ishak spy upon the lovers as they talk in prison. On his way to the prison Hassan asks: "Could you spy on that? How cruel!" and Ishak replies: "The poet must learn what man's agony can teach him." But the attitude of Flecker and of Hassan is not that of someone who suffers only at the thought of pain;

there is an element of pleasure in the pain which revolts both the dramatist and his poet. Hassan turns from love and life in despair to escape from cruelty, he turns from the fountain of beauty which runs with blood; for him there remains only the pure pleasure of the contemplation of his carpet and of the shadows which "pass gigantic on the sand." The departure on the Golden Road to Samarkand is a rejection of the brilliant, solid world of Flecker, the Parnassian, with its sparkling images, its cruel desires, its witty and macabre incongruities, a world æsthetically complete. Hassan himself, and Flecker, step forth to the vague strains of romanticism, but the brilliant world of the imagined Baghdad remains behind them, the achievement of Flecker's life.

CHAPTER III

LAURENCE BINYON AND JOHN MASEFIELD

ROMANTICISM in poetic drama of the kind that languished on through the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and had its burst of new vitality in the plays of Stephen Phillips has sunk out of sight since his time, and there remain only the plays of Binyon and Masefield to carry on the tradition. Masefield writes as a Romanticist because of the genuine simplicity and naiveté of his nature, because of the close relationship he has to the feelings and taste of the ordinary man, but Binyon, as a cousin both of Stephen Phillips and of Sir Frank Benson, carries on into our times the literary traditions of the past and of his family, and shares their literary ideals.

Binyon started his literary career by winning the Newdigate Prize, and he has published many poems. He was Keeper of the Prints at the British Museum, has written several able books on oriental art, and is well-known as one of the greatest authorities in England on the subject. His play-writing has naturally been subsidiary to his work in fine art, but he has had several of his works produced in London theatres, *Paris and Ænone*, a literary play of rather languid movement, being produced in 1906 at the Savoy, *Attila* at His Majesty's in 1907, and *Arthur* at the Old Vic in 1923.

Attila was produced by Oscar Asche, who also took the main part. Oscar Asche, at one time a Bensonian, joined Beerbohm Tree at His Majesty's and took over the management of that theatre in 1907. He possessed the great gift of making plays popular, and his *Chu Chin Chow*, written and

produced by himself, had probably the longest run of any play in theatrical history.

The play *Attila* shows the strong feeling of cousinship towards Stephen Phillips that Binyon possessed, for *Attila* has a historical subject, passed through the waters of Elizabethan drama and modified by the refined feeling of the early twentieth century.

Attila, king of the Huns, asks a soothsayer about the future; he is told that all three sons, including his favourite, Hanak, will die, and he is much disturbed at this news. There is considerable disaffection amongst the troops, since Attila, because of his love for a captured Burgundian princess, Idilco, does not go to war. The faithful follower, Ongesius, surrounds Attila with the romantic pseudo-classical glamour of the hero of the heroic play:

Ongesius: Have you forgot the sword?

Huns: Attila's sword!

Ongesius: The miracle, the sword God flung from Heaven
There on the Scythian steppe: have you forgot
How when the Hunnish host stood in amaze
And terror as you stand now, Attila
Caught up the sword as 'twere God's thunderbolt
Of everlasting wrath.

There is a plot against Attila by Sigismund, Idilco's foster brother. Unfavourable comparisons come into our minds with Othello when in the hubbub Attila appears in the night and commands:

Free him! by God's wrath
Do you know your king?

At Idilco's request Sigismund is pardoned and a love scene follows. The love scene is coldly passionate and morally high-toned as we expect from both writers, Binyon and Phillips. Binyon feels that abandoned passion is called for and intellectually he approves of it, but in feeling he shrinks from it, with the result that in this play, as in *Arthur*, we get the impression that he is deliberately being unconventional and sufficiently broad-minded to include these illicit passions within his moral approval. It is because Binyon is

feeling at second-hand that he uses images which have a too familiar ring. Idilco speaks:

My captain and my king!
Let me not think: I totter. O blind me, blind me
In love that burns up all I cast away!
Let it all burn, and one great single flame
Clothe us for ever Hide me, thou strong tower.

Captains and kings, love's burning passions, the strong tower of masculinity, how safe and familiar all these phrases are, so safe that illicit passion seems almost as if sanctified by marriage! In his reply, in which Attila says that Idilco, as part of Fate, has slain his sons, and that she must give him new ones, he clothes his passion in phrases taken from the mould of Elizabethan drama, which for that reason seem less spontaneous in their feeling:

Thou challenge of mortality, thou Queen!
Is it of mortal stuff that thou art made,
That housest Time's great secret?

The love scene is interrupted by trumpets in the night—a sign of Fate as in Phillips's plays—and emissaries from Rome appear. They bring a message of an offer of marriage from the sister of the Emperor of Rome which makes Attila waver in his allegiance to Idilco and brings about his ruin. Theatrical interest is given to the play by a feast scene with clanging gongs and a flourish of the sacred sword which brings forth the cry from every one "The Sword of God"; there is also the excitement of seeing Sigismund killed after a further attack on Attila. Attila, afterwards, pours out his love to Idilco, but with a prayer to the God of her fathers to help her, Idilco kills him before his warriors burst in.

The play is clearly in the romantic tradition of Stephen Phillips; the old heroic drama features appear again—the raging powerful warrior king, the indomitable heroine ready to kill to avenge her honour, the unanimous crowd acclaiming its admiration, the scenes of feasting and festivity, the conspiracies and deaths. Only Binyon has not the flair of Stephen Phillips for revivifying an old body, for surrounding

an outworn subject and mode with a glamorous light, which is a light even though it fades away as the years pass on.

Binyon's next play, *Arthur*, published in 1923, is dedicated to Sir Martin and Lady Harvey and in his preface Binyon says that he undertook to write this play for them, that he discussed the situation with them and that he rejected and re-cast parts, with their advice. It is really a long chronicle play, consisting of more or less disconnected scenes dealing with the life of Launcelot and his relationship with Guinevere. It includes scenes in the convent where Guinevere took refuge at the end of her life, and where she receives news of Arthur's death. The theme of illicit love is again "ennobled" by Binyon through the philosophy of love that one of the nuns in the convent gives:

Love, only love that knows no measure; love
That understands all sorrows and all sins,
Love that alone changes the hearts of men,
And gives to the last heart-beat, only love
Suffices.

Binyon's most ambitious play, *Ayuli*, was published in 1923 and was probably intended for reading rather than for presentation on the stage. It is a three-act play dealing with the love of an Eastern king for a beautiful woman, Ayuli, for which he sacrifices his kingdom. His people rise up against him in wrath, and Ayuli, to save the king, adorns herself and gives herself up to the mob's rage. Heartbroken, the king wanders in exile and returns at last to the scene of her murder, where in a vision Ayuli returns to him. The love of the king for Ayuli is not treated as an infatuation bringing a kingdom to ruin, but as an attempt to set up beauty as the ruling principle of life. Binyon, as an intellectual, with his subtle appreciation of beauty in art, is feeling that his love of beauty is primarily that of the intellectual, civilized man, and not that of the simple type of man who lives primarily in action and uncomplicated sensation. It is the sigh of the intellectual man pining for the life he can never fully experience that we hear in the king's speech:

Men called me
 Circumspect, prudent, sage: and the praise pleased,
 How foolishly! I read old books, and talked them,
 A philosophic animal, and thought
 That I was happy. Happiness! O fools
 To talk of happiness, when life is here
 Infinite in horizon, and all power
 That ever mightiest of man has used
 Is nothing to that possibility.

Beauty that is sufficient in itself, love with abandon, is the theme that Binyon is celebrating and for this Ayuli says she is born:

Because I go where my own nature calls,
 Because I have a heart and live in it, . . .
 And I love with my blood, my thoughts, my fears,
 My hopes, beyond all hope, beyond all fear,
 All shame. . . .

It is a theme with possibilities, but the weakness of the play is that the Ayulis of this world do not talk about love and life: they love and live. These philosophizings on the event are the fine spun reasonings of the intellectual worrying about whether he is really living in the full sense, not the poetic dramatist's expression of his character's feelings. We are the less convinced by the power and flow of passions, by the supreme importance of the immortal principle of beauty because the images used, the expression given to the feeling, do not seem to come from the felt truth of experience but from the dim mirror of the central pool of romantic literature. Oran, the poet, recites his hymn of praise to beauty:

When Beauty's voice is heard,
 It is like joy of home-coming that stings to sudden tears,
 And youth's lost thoughts recaptured in a secret word.
 When Beauty gazes forth, strong towers fall from high,
 Kingdoms are trodden underfoot, laid waste and bare.
 The world is dust before the shining of her eye.

After such a string of well-used images the mind lies flat; it feels like a much trodden turf which has lost its resilience. And as the play proceeds to its climax and we are told that

Kind nature's healthful trance
Will intermit a peace,

and that

Your voice is running water in the desert
And I am thirsting sand,

our minds agree with the intellectual premise that beauty is a beautiful thing and leave it at that.

John Masefield is the poet of to-day with the greatest popular reputation, and the general appreciation of his writing has been officially recognized by his appointment as Poet Laureate. His position in the literary world of to-day is, however, not altogether enviable. His works are bought in hundreds of thousands, and they are not only bought, but read. Yet if we look at the reviews in weekly and monthly periodicals we find a contemptuous note, a pitying condescension, or, at best, an admission that Masefield is a poet who has thrown away his birthright. It is easy to see why this tone appears in these reviews. Masefield pays no attention to the opinion of literary critics, he writes profusely and does not revise his works, and he has, apparently no sense of self-criticism, so that good or bad verse flows from his pen indifferently.

Masefield is one of the few genuinely unashamed romantics among the men of letters of to-day, and what he cares for in life is the experiencing of many different kinds of beauty and the expression of this experience in verse. He throws open the wide net of his mind and personality and takes into it everything that comes his way. Nor, when his material is within his net, does he sift or separate it, and only rarely does he strive to give to it the individual form which marks it as the artist's own possession. Instead of this he gives back to the world what he has absorbed almost unchanged in essence, only clothed in pleasing verse. It is this method of writing which accounts for the vast bulk of Masefield's work, and for its repetitive, unselected effect. The secret of Masefield's hold over his readers is that his appreciation of beauty is genuine, and that he finds beauty quite unashamedly in the same places as the ordinary man and

expresses for him his own feelings in a language and a form that he can understand and appreciate. Masfield is separated by a wide gulf from popular writers of a lower type because his appreciation of beauty and the emotion aroused by it in him are genuine, and there is indeed something childlike and unsophisticated in his attitude which is very different from that of those writers who merely wish to make money by exploiting the sentimental tastes of their audience.

Masfield's unquestioning attitude to life and the extent to which he shares in common the tastes of his readers is best seen, perhaps, in the series of plays he has written on religious subjects. These plays, such as *Good Friday* and *The Trial of Jesus*, attempt to put before us events in the life of Christ in such a way that they will appeal to people of to-day. Departures from the traditions of the Gospels are made, but on the whole when Masfield is dealing with the central figure his treatment is straightforward and simple. It is in the comment or chorus that the "beauty" which Masfield is always wishing to express appears. In *Good Friday* the sole ally of Christ is a Madman, the figure so dear to the literary mind when it wants to touch heartstrings. The Madman is the being with vision who sees the truth about Christ to which other people are blind. He speaks of his life as an old blind beggar in poverty and disgrace, and then turns for comfort to his life after death:

I will go on, although my old heart ache.
Not long, not long.
Soon I shall pass behind
This changing veil to that which does not change,
My tired feet will range
In some green valley of eternal mind
Where Truth is daily like the water's song.

When Christ is on the cross He speaks again:

Beyond the pain, beyond the broken clay,
A glimmering country lies
Where life is being wise,
All of the beauty seen by truthful eyes
Are lilies there, growing beside the way.

Those golden ones will loose the torted hands,
Smooth the scarred brow, gather the breaking soul,
Whose earthly moments drop like falling sands
To leave the spirit whole.

Changing veils and eternity, green valleys and truth, lilies and gold, time and hour-glasses, these images are all bound together, and seem familiar to us in our minds. They are the free associations of a mind well versed in hymns, in the vague sentimental religious feelings of the mass of the people. To one brought up with an ordinary religious training the phrases float upon the surface of the mind like oil on the top of water. Such images surround the ordinary man's mind like a comforting blanket, something felt vaguely comforting and warm, but not perceived as having a definite identity; they are not the result of the subtle associations of the poet.

Masefield is known chiefly as a poet writing about the countryside and its life, its fox-hunting, and its village tragedies, or as a poet writing on the English joy in the sea. But his mind is receptive to beauty found in literature as well as to beauty in nature, and he absorbs eagerly the world of romance of the Bible, of French literature, of English legend. Nor does the influence of literature upon him make him merely imitative, for his response to its beauty is genuine and unaffected, and he takes upon himself some of its quality, giving back its reflection as does a lake. He reads Racine and adapts or partially translates *Bérénice* and *Esther*. The mind of Racine and of Masefield have little in common, and yet Masefield, in *Esther*, gives to us a version of the French play which carries with it something of the nobility which we find also in Racine.

Masefield adapts *Esther* to the needs of the English stage, and changes a narrative scene to a central melodramatic scene of action—that of the nightmare of King Ahasuerus, and in this he is quite justified. The choruses are no longer, as they are with Racine, symbols of a great race in exile, and they lose in impressiveness when they wail as individual voices about the possibility of becoming “moths flying about the lamps of life at night in death's great darkness,” but the

choruses are in keeping with the play, and they are not used as an opportunity for introducing sentimental rhapsodies about chance associations of beauty. Masfield's impressionable mind is subdued by the solemn beauty of Racine's, and his English play, *Esther*, has imaginative beauty and individuality.

In *A King's Daughter* (1923) Masfield is writing on a biblical theme—that of the story of Jezebel—without direction from another author. His view of Jezebel's character is original and has no connection with the one found in the Bible. He does not adopt the Bible's savagely written condemnation of Jezebel, but turns her into a heroine, a victim of the evil plots of her enemies and the melancholia of her husband, the king. Her ending reminds one of the death of Cleopatra for, sighing for the romance of her Syrian home, she dresses herself in glorious robes, adorns her face, and, saying farewell to her devoted handwomen, goes to her lurid death. The whole story is sentimentalized, and this effect is increased by the nature of the lengthy choruses which relate the history of Helen of Troy, her remorse for the destruction her beauty has brought about, and her consolation by Niriüs who says that it was a privilege to die for her. The Biblical story of Jezebel and the Homeric story of Helen remain as violent contrasts in our minds, and Masfield cannot combine them for us, or make them anything but intolerable neighbours; we are left with the feeling that Masfield introduces the Helen choruses simply because he wishes to write lyrically and romantically about Helen somewhere.

Masfield is not daunted by the familiarity of a subject and by the fact that it has been the theme of literature many times before he touches it. His simple, uncomplicated attitude towards life as being a world full of romantic beauty, there for all to taste and all to enjoy, beauty of such a kind that it can readily call forth enthusiastic rapture, makes him accept legend and literature as he accepts the beauties of nature as being good material for his art. So he turns from the Bible and from Racine to the legend of Tristram and

Iseult and in his play, *Tristan and Isolt* (1927) he does succeed in giving a version which has freshness of its own, and romantic picturesque writing which is never used for its own sake as it is in *The King's Daughter*. In writing his version of the legend he gives it individuality by creating it in the tradition of the old English rustic play of the Middle Ages, which still survives in various forms in country districts. He does not copy existing well-known mediæval plays, but with ready adaptability of mind he recreates his legend in this form, giving to the legend a new freshness and vigour. Destiny gives the prelude with simplicity:

I am She who began ere Man was begotten,
I am deathless, unsleeping; my task is to make
Beginnings prosper to glory and crumble to rotten
By the deeds of women and men and the ways that they take.
I am apple and snake.

Tristan himself is not the glorified hero of romance, talking with the romantic lover's language; he is the simple, untried youth seeking adventure and talking as a lad:

Tristan: You have brought me over the sea, far from our home,
To a castle perchd on a crag at the world's end,
Yet never said why. Then here in the castle, father,
Nobody speaks, but all go still as the grave,
As though they were under a curse. What is this castle?

He finds King Marc dominated by a pirate, Kolbein, who demands the service of Marc's men, and he frees Marc by killing Kolbein in single combat, and then goes to woo Isolt for his king. The drinking of the magic cup of love by the lovers, Tristan and Isolt, and the revelation of love which it brings is also expressed with simplicity and almost with plain roughness:

Tristan: To your fortune, Isolt, princess; be it ever happy.
O golden beauty, I love you so that I die.
If you cannot speak some solace, I am but dead.

Isolt: I cannot speak a solace, being so swayed;
But you are my one thought, you are my life, my love;
I care not what may happen so I have you.

Tristan: To-night at sea we shall be each other's, beloved.

As is fitting for a rustic play emotional subtlety takes little part in the story of the loves of Tristan and Isolt; the interest is in the outwitting of King Marc and his suspicious followers on the wedding night, by the substitution of Brangwyn for Isolt, in the betrayal of the lovers and their escape to the woods, in the cruelty of Isolt and in the death of the lovers together. Isolt, after her brief mood of remorse, her return to King Marc as his wife, and her scourging of Tristan as a penance to them both, goes back to the woods to find her lover dying and to kill herself. She does not look into her heart and subtly anatomize the emotion of love; she looks simply at the world around her and says her sad farewell:

The brook will run down
Over the shingle to sea; and the corncrake call;
And the honeysuckle, up in the glen, drowse sweetness:
And the moon come over the hill: mother will have them,
Not I: I shall not have them What shall I have?
Some sky for the two wild swans to be wing in wing,
Some holly thicket for the stag and his deer,
Some space in heaven, where I, the comet, will seek
My mate, past withering orbs and moons gone blind,
For centuries to come.

The middle part of the play is given up to rustic comedy, for Tristan, in order to send a message of warning by the swineherd to Isolt, offers to guard the pigs from thieves; plotters against Tristan come in disguise and are finally overwhelmed by the swineherd and his family beating them and covering them with filth. The comedy is lively, vigorous, simple, and also in keeping with the idea of primitive English tragedy, as an amalgamation of different elements, for Masfield's active early life with its contact with many different kinds of people has given him understanding of the kind of knock-about comedy which is timeless.

Poetic drama as a form of literature does not satisfy any peculiar need in Masfield's nature. He has a nature which spreads itself wide and gathers in all things; he prefers

poetic narrative to drama and lyric, since in narrative the need for compression and for selection is not forced upon him. His gift is for reflecting the world about him, and he lacks the deep inner spring of emotional life which is distinguished from the common flow of humanity and which therefore needs its individual distinctive form of expression.

CHAPTER IV

WILFRED WILSON GIBSON AND JOHN DRINKWATER

THESE two writers, with Lascelles Abercrombie, are associated in a definite reaction against the tradition of using for poetic drama subjects which bring with them a wealth of romantic associations. They choose subjects which take them in contact with modern life and its problems, and this generally means that they take their subjects from contemporary life, as does Gibson. This however is not inevitable, for *Phœnix*, Abercrombie's latest play, is about an imaginary episode taking place before the Trojan War, yet his play has a modern subject for it is concerned with a sexual problem, which, though ever present, is modern in the sense that there is more acute consciousness of it in our times.

These three writers wish to deal with contemporary life, but the realistic writing of the modern prose drama does not appeal to them. This drama is more concerned with the bourgeoisie of the cities or of suburban life, and the writers of it are inclined to see humanity in the solid blocks into which civilization has formed them, outwardly if not inwardly. These three writers want to separate man from the welter of social life in which he lives, and to see him against the background of nature, and for that reason it is the life of the countryman which appeals to them as a subject. There is a reaction also in them against the kind of language used by writers of poetic drama, language remote from that of everyday speech; the jewelled ornate phrase of Flecker, the smooth flow of flaccid beauty, the re-dressing of traditional language of Phillips would seem to them foreign to the kind of effect they wish to produce. Romanticism of setting, treatment

and language is to them an artificial survival, and incapable of expressing modern life.

Wilfred Wilson Gibson has written a large number of poems, narrative and lyric: he has contributed largely with Drinkwater and Abercrombie to the publication, *New Numbers*, and, with many other poets, to the volumes of *Georgian Poets*.

In addition his poems have appeared in numerous volumes such as *Fires* and *Liveliness* and in *Collected Poems* 1905-25. He has also published three volumes of poetic dramas—*Stonefolds* (1907), *Daily Bread* (1910), *Kestrel Edge* (1924) and, in addition, *Krindlesyke*, which was not intended for dramatic production. His first volume contains his best work as a poetic dramatist.

The aim of Gibson as a poetic dramatist is very simple and the limits of his art are narrow. He wishes to cut away the unessentials of existence until he gets to the centre, and, unlike most of us living to-day, he is certain what the centre is. He does not see life as a complicated web, in which the furthest point of every spoke is connected by living tissue to the centre; he does not think it possible that every detail of a man's existence may have some deeply felt significance. Outward things are to him meaningless, and the complicated structure of civilization an evil; to him the poet's subject is to be found in the simple ordinary life of the industrial and rustic worker.

Gibson is clearly very much influenced by Wordsworth in the attitude he takes towards life and art. It is the Wordsworth of *Margaret* and *Michael* which influences him because of the sense that life is a unity, and that living and suffering, and even death itself, are part of a whole in which there is nobility. Gibson writes with the faith that birth, death and the struggle to gain a living are of such supreme importance, so far overshadowing everything else in life, that the work of an artist is to seize his man or woman at the moment when the emotion aroused by their experiences of these things is dominant. He shares this conviction that life is tragic, but worth experiencing, and is justified in itself,

with two greater artists, Wordsworth and Arnold Bennett.

In the title play *Stonefolds*, Gibson expresses in a short scene the core of life, as he sees it, birth and death, enduring and suffering, and steadfastness. The scene is a cottage. The old man feels the isolation of age, since he cannot help with the lambing and can only watch a delicate newborn lamb that has been brought to the fireside. He talks with his wife of the helpless love of the young shepherd, Ralph, for their daughter Ruth, who has married unhappily. Ruth returns and gives birth to a baby who is put beside the lamb. Ralph comes and rejoices that Ruth has come back, but his joy is turned to sorrow when he hears that she has died in childbirth. The baby and the lamb die while the shepherd and his wife lament:

Nicholas: We two have seen so many young things born,
So many perish, yet death takes us not.
Wife, shut the door; that wind blows through my bones.
It's a long night. What hour is that?

Rachel: It's one:
The night is over.

Nicholas: Yet another day.

Gibson probably wrote about rustic people living simple lives because he felt that such people were more concerned with the general rhythm and groundwork of life than others. Upon all people, at certain times in their living, it is forced home that birth and death are the most important things, but the general structure of their existence and of their imaginative life is so complicated that this fact is lost sight of except at special moments of their lives. Gibson, in *Stonefolds*, as in many of his poems, is writing about farming people whose ordinary routine is concerned with the birth and death of sheep, and the main interests of these people are the simple facts of the cycle in human life and in sheep life, so that the two interests are to some extent woven together in their minds. Such a play as *Stonefolds* is hardly drama in the usual sense; it is rather the expression of a mood, or of the feeling tone of life. Wordsworth's *Margaret*, though the narrative proceeds from one event to another, is static in the sense that

it expresses constantly the nobility of a ruined human life. *Stonefolds* is static in the sense that throughout the play there is the acceptance of the rhythm of human life, and the events in the play make no change in this impression.

Gibson probably felt dissatisfied with the static nature of this play and also of *The Scar* and *On the Threshold*, for in *The Bridal* and *Winter Dawn* he attempts to give his plays the interest of exciting events and violent emotion.

In *The Bridal* the events are but related, and the dramatic interest is in the emotional effect of the narrative upon the narrator and the listeners. The hero brings back his bride without warning his invalid mother. Full of foreboding, she tells to her son the story of her marriage. Her husband was fierce and strong; she feared him and her fear killed his love and aroused his hate.

One day when his hand touched me I shrank back:
He saw, and sudden fury filled his eyes;
He clutched me by the throat with savage grip,
And flung me fiercely from him, and I fell.

Later he hurls her against the fireplace, and injures her for life, and in remorse, he kills himself by jumping down a precipice. The mother fears that the son will be as violent as the father, but the wife refuses to let him go.

In *Winter Dawn* the tragic events take place in the play; the mother and the wife await the home coming of a farmer. He returns at last, but blind and insane, inheriting his disease from his grandfather. His wife at first shrinks from him, but then accepts him as her care. No more is Gibson trying to build up a dramatic mood which shall express the quiet tide of life. Both plays are melodramatic, that is, they contain violent events and strong emotions which are not made believable. Men do murder and injure their wives, and men do become insane and blind, but we do not believe events in poetry or drama because events like them occur in life. We cannot be shocked into emotional sympathy with the characters in books; rather are we persuaded into belief because the artist creates a whole which is in perfect harmony

with itself. Gibson in these two plays has a quiet ordinary rustic setting with quiet ordinary people placed in it, and the violent events, which take place and are related, are like violent eruptions in a countryside far from volcanoes.

In the volume of *Daily Bread* the element of melodrama is especially strong. Sudden deaths, violent passions, seductions and deliriums abound. It is true that in the lives of certain individual workers the fear of fatal accident looms large, and the incidents which Gibson uses are believable in themselves. But his small plays in this volume give the impression that they are akin to short stories in parish magazines and, as in these stories, one can anticipate the ending with unfailing certainty. So in *The Family's Pride* the news is to be broken to a woman that her five sons have been killed, but she dies at the right moment before this news reaches her. In *The Mother* the woman who has taken marriage and maternity too lightly leaves her sick child for her own amusement's sake, and the child dies in her absence, tended by the woman who is spiritually his mother. In *The Furnace* and *The Nightshift* a startling effect is aimed at by showing the mind in delirium.

In his later volume of plays, *Kestrel Edge* (1924), Gibson is no longer dramatizing short stories but novels, and we feel when we have read these plays that Gibson before writing them said to himself: "Here are some good forceful stories; I will turn them into verse." *Lover's Leap*, which is one of these plays, deals with a subject which Gibson seems to find rather congenial, the powerful, brutal man with a strongly developed sexual instinct. With him we find the timid fretful wife, her stern contemptuous mother-in-law, the hired farm girl whom the man feels to be his true mate, discovered after many experiments. The girl, forceful as the man but self-contained, to save her sister from her master, goes with him to the rock of Lover's Leap and when he approaches her pushes him over, and then throws herself over the rock.

The whole setting of the play, the stern remote atmosphere of "Windwhistle," the northern farm, the aggressive-

ness of the master, the defiance of the hired girl, his own "mate" in reality, the complaining of the wife and the bitter scolding of the mother-in-law would fit in better with the more leisurely motion of the novel. As it is, the framework of the play heightens to absurdity all the melodramatic elements of the plot. *Kestrel Edge* itself might be a Hardy novel in verse, as far as the subject goes. A mother has two sons, one a sheep farmer and the other a "ranter." Her lover has killed her old husband, she thinks in fair fight, but really through murder. Her sons hear of this, and the religious preacher goes and kills the lover as a sacred duty, and then collapses through fear of hell. His brother takes the blame of the murder and then kills himself.

In his early experiments with the expression of the feeling tone of a life, of significant mood, Gibson probably felt that the line of his drama was too tight, that it needed expansion. It is for this reason that he turns to the violent occurrences and emotions which he knew appeared in real life, and which he thought with simple expression would make a direct appeal. But we get the impression from reading Gibson's thick volume of poetic works that he looked at the lives of industrial and rustic workers, chose from their lives the more sensational moments and tried to turn these moments without further re-creative process into verse. The distance between life as it is lived and life as it is felt in poetry is very great, and it cannot be bridged by a facile sympathy and a gift for-versification. We read with detachment the catalogue of woes, for the emotion of the author and its expression cannot sway us. We remain detached spectators observing the hurricane knock over the bricks. As for the tension of Gibson's line which we notice in his early poems, it is caused very largely, not by lack of action, but by the kind of language he uses. He has a certain variety of style. All his verse is not so clearly modelled on actual speech as is the talk of the garrulous and prolific labourer's wife in *Summer Dawn*.

Twelve shillings don't go far,
With rents so high and food and clothes and firing:
But I have little to grumble at; I've only

Six bairns to feed: my mother had thirteen,
 And ten born after father'd lost his sight
 Blasting, soon after they were wed, and she'd
 Three babes in arms at once, the twins and Dick,

but at all times he strives after a bareness of effect which he feels to be suitable for the realistic treatment of simple people. His characters are not restrained in the amount they say, as is often the case with people of their type in real life, nor have they any gift for condensation nor any dislike of repeating themselves. But they do not use images or words peculiar to poetry, and it is clear that Gibson's aim is to make them say either what they would say in the same circumstances in real life, or what one would guess they might say to make the action clear. His early plays, such as *Stone-folds*, are written in a style which shows restraint and a feeling for the beauty of the "tight line," but the effects that can be produced with this kind of style are very limited. The most valuable advantage that a poetic dramatist possesses over a prose one is that he can use poetic imagery. The poetic dramatist who seeks to be representational rather than symbolic in his language is depending upon very slender resources.

John Drinkwater is the most widely known and the most successful in gaining popular favour of the three writers who write primarily for repertory theatres. He has followed many occupations in his life—business, theatre management, writing of drama, biography and belles-lettres. He won some reputation for himself by his volume, *Tides*, in 1917, and also by his poetic plays, written for the Birmingham Repertory Theatre—*Rebellion*, *Storm*, *The God of Quiet*. Drinkwater gained a popular reputation at one stroke by the production of his first prose play, *Abraham Lincoln*, in 1918. This play, which is built closely on the historical foundation of fact, deals with Lincoln as a hero, and stresses especially his idealisation, his Christian charity, his hatred of revenge and lack of all malice towards his enemies and ends with his tragic assassination. The play won great popularity in England because it was exactly the right play for the right

moment. In 1918 there was great interest felt towards America as a nation with whom England had a common bond of patriotism, and this increased the interest in American history. President Wilson was still regarded as a leader amongst men and President Wilson pretty clearly modelled his speeches and utterances on those of Lincoln. The Lincoln of the play voiced the thoughts and feelings of more enlightened people, the desire for generosity in making peace, the policy of no revenge. For these reasons *Abraham Lincoln* seized on people's imaginations and became a great success. It was the first of a series of plays written about historical figures by Drinkwater—Robert Lee, Cromwell, Burns, Mary Queen of Scots. Taken as a whole these biographical plays are not of great value as literature, for they are neither very strong historically nor very creative. The reason for Drinkwater's success with cultured audiences in the case of *Abraham Lincoln* was that Drinkwater possesses the typical cultured but ordinary mind. He has all the interests of the cultured but not highly intelligent man. He likes all the things that consciously cultured people like, for example, the one spot of English country, sanctified to his private use, for it is the modern custom to make a corner in rusticity. In international matters in the war he was ahead of the vast herd of people who wanted revenge and moral dishonour, but as one of the intelligentsia it is easy for him to stand aloof from mob passions, though not from more subtle influences of his own kind. In problems of moral conduct he takes the more "advanced" standpoint, and in Mary Queen of Scots we have the heroine who, as is explained in the prologue to the play, has too big a nature to confine herself to one love or one lover. Clearly Drinkwater belongs to the enlightened class, but his mind walks as gingerly within the limits and standards set by his own class, as does the more ordinary man within his more conventional limitations. Drinkwater's mind is an essentially pedestrian one, and, making allowance for the difference in environment, his ideas are just as commonplace as those of the man in the street.

All Drinkwater's writings are very closely bound up with

his own personality, and at no time do we find him writing as an objective writer. Clearly, when taken into consideration with his life and works, Mary Queen of Scots is just as much a fantasy picture of one side of him, as Lincoln and Cromwell is of another. There is something significant also about the title of his more recent works, *All about Me* 1928, *More about Me* 1929. True, these are volumes of poems written for children, but taken together with his book of 1931, *Inheritance*, an autobiography concentrating especially on his ancestry, they do stress Drinkwater's naïve egoism.

Books of all kinds Drinkwater has produced—biographical plays, volumes of poems, prose studies of poets and men of letters, anthologies and poems for children, literary essays, a very successful comedy, *The Bird in Hand*, and even a biography of Carl Laemmle, the film producer. Drinkwater's poetic dramas are limited to the period of his life connected with the Birmingham Repertory Company. After the success of *Abraham Lincoln* he wrote no more poetic dramas, for as a man of the theatre he realized that the production of these plays, except to very limited audiences, was almost impossible. His poetic dramas are *Cophetua* (1911), *Rebellion* (1914), *Storm*, and two plays, *The God of Quiet* and *X=O* which anticipate *Abraham Lincoln* in the treatment of war as a subject. *Cophetua* is a very short play, probably intended as a curtain raiser, which was performed at the Birmingham Repertory Theatre. Cophetua's courtiers urge him to marry but he refuses until he meets the beggar maid, when he falls in love and then regards his love as a divine call. The subject, a mawkish one, has not been redeemed by the treatment, and the metre adopted, four beats and an alternate rhyme, is an unsuitable one for drama.

Rebellion, a three-act drama, is in blank verse, which is a much more effective measure as used by Drinkwater. The scene of the play is in some vague time in the past. The people are in rebellion against Phane, the king, and they are led by Narros, the poet, almost against his will, since he does not think their cause sufficiently important. Shubia, the queen, despises the king for his attitude towards life and is

ready to love Narros but considers that he thinks too much of paltry things. Both believe in the importance of the freedom of the spirit in love and the unimportance of the things of daily life which occupy the minds of most people. They part, Narros to lead the rebellion for the sake of his promise. He is triumphant over the king, but is left lamenting the death of Shubia. The play is quite competently written and interesting, but Drinkwater has been wise on the whole to abandon poetic drama and take to prose, for in writing poetic drama he suffers from a serious disadvantage. This lies in the quality of his imagery. Drinkwater is essentially not a visualist, and yet, as is the case with many non-visual writers he seems to be irresistibly drawn to using visual imagery. Take such a passage as:

And there the eagles of desire
Cry up the wind in sinewy flight,
Not shamed of the immoderate fire
That feeds the crucibles of lust,
And there the ploughs of reason rust
In reason's night.

Drinkwater, clearly, has not his eye on what he is describing at all. We feel drawn to ask why the eagles should be shamed and what have they to do in their flight with any crucible of lust, what have the eagles or the crucibles to do with ploughs, and why should the ploughs rust in the night? Again there is a more extreme example of the peculiarity of Drinkwater's imagery in *Cophetua*, when the king asks

Do you hold me a gibbering clod among men,
To waver and juggle with speech.

The intrinsic clod-like nature of the clod is broken, and words cease to have any essential meaning. Common sense analysis of imagery is not the right test to apply to poetry, it may be said, but the point is that when imagery is used by a poet who is in some measure a visualist this kind of criticism does not occur to the mind, because the imagery is felt by the reader to be essentially right. Drinkwater sees his imagery as separate intellectual entities, as allegories, the outward

form of which has a separate body from the inward meaning. He does not see his images as real forms existing in a real world, forms which may interfere with each other. He sees them merely as intellectual ideas in a world of space within his own mind, where every image has room to revolve round itself separately. In other words he is completely non-visual without realizing it, and he can only use visual imagery with disaster. He can describe the concrete which is before him aptly in his poems and with some beauty, for he is dealing then directly with his own experience. Once, however, he gets away from what he sees before his eyes and combines images in his mind he is lost, because then he is right away from his own experience and he is groping in the darkness at the forms of objects. Naturally one does not wish every writer to be as definitely a visualist as was Flecker, and indeed, the richest and most satisfying imagery comes from a poet who is not only a visualist, but also has senses of sound and of smell contributing a rich harmony of complex experience. But the imagery used, of whatever kind, must have the felt truth of experience, and not merely be the result of the intellectual motion of the mind.

The Storm is Drinkwater's one poetic drama about country life. It represents the suspense of a wife about the fate of her husband, who is lost in the storm, and the effect on her mind of the news of his death. The play is not intended to be realistic, and the dialogue is meant to express the emotional struggle within the woman's mind between hope and fear. The part of Nemesis is taken by an old woman who insists that the husband is dead and will never return, and the young sister plays the part of the confidante. At the end of the play men appear bringing the husband's body, and the conflict is resolved with the comment of the wife: "Why have we waited all this time to know?" The play has a certain dignity of idea and of expression, but it is meditative rather than dramatic in its structure, which consists purely in the conversation between the women in the house, the arrival of a stranger who describes the storm at length, and the coming of the news of the death; it is also meditative in its language

in a measure which takes it almost outside the scope of drama. The language used at times gives one the feeling that the emotion is woven whole in the author's mind, and not given life in the course of its projection into the being of the drama. So the wife describes to her young sister the woman's part in marriage, which to her view is the hewing of rough material presented in her husband into a man worthy of esteem and honour.

My little Joan,
Do you know at all what a man becomes to a woman?
How should you though? If a man should take
A patch of the barren hill and dig with his hands
And down and down till he came to marble and gold,
And labouring then for a dozen years or twenty,
Should build a place finer than Solomon's hall. . . .

and the two halves of the simile expand for twenty-five lines. The well-pulley effect of the long simile is not a suitable dramatic implement. (The mind must not go backwards and forwards in a drama; it must rush to its objective) The intense concentration of imagery is the greatest advantage that the poetic dramatist has over the prose writer. Drinkwater's weakness in imagery occurs once more in a different guise. He happens to have the kind of mind which does not think naturally or happily in imagery. He does not see an image with blinding reality in a flash which disappears; he sees it as a concept and he then has to walk round this concept, gazing at it from every angle. The truth is that he thinks in words and not in images, and images for him are elaborately constructed, after he has thought in words, to fit his already completed thought. Partly because of the defect in his imagery, and partly because Drinkwater is not a very precise thinker, words are for him smooth counters rather than individual stones, each of which has its individual shape and feel. A "clod," for example, is for him a vague metaphor applied to people rather dense in intelligence, not a good thick piece of rich sticky earth which can only move when shattered by a spade, when it falls in pieces and loses its clod-nature for ever.

There is only one kind of poetic drama for which Drinkwater's gifts fit him, and that is the kind of drama which aims at expressing intellectual truths in a persuasive manner. There is a place for this kind of writing. We find it in morality plays, and Drinkwater's most successful plays resemble morality plays in their atmosphere. As we have already said Drinkwater does not possess either an original or a remarkably acute mind, but he has the power of feeling with truth and sincerity certain basic ideas about life and expressing them attractively and persuasively. *The God of Quiet* (1917) does not present individuals; the people in the plays are types of humanity wearied with war and with the struggles for useless gain. They come outside the besieged city and sit at the feet of the statue of the God of Quiet—kings, beggars, a soldier and a citizen. Even the soldier comes to renounce his claim to renown:

For every hero compassing his crown,
Darkly in indistinguishable sleep
A hundred lie, and the quick world shall keep
No word of how their hearts were bright, how spent
At last. I am of these, and am content.

The quarrel starts once more and everyone returns to the struggle and the God of Quiet falls crying out:

Not one of you in all the world to know me.

By means of the dramatic parallelism indicated in the title, $X=O$, the identical ideas and fears, the lack of personal animosity in the young soldier are put before us. We are shown the Greek and Trojan camps with the young men homesick for the beauty of their native land; they feel that a meaningless war is going to tear from them the chance of realizing their dreams in life, their careers as artists and statesmen. One of the young men expresses Drinkwater's feeling for the quiet beauty of the country:

It's a dear home,
And fragrant, and there's blessed fruit and corn
And thoughts that make me older than my youth

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Come over from the nettles at the gate,
To-day, perhaps, the harvesters are out,
And on the night is the ripe pollen blown.

With no malign intention on the part of the instrument of
war, the young men of both sides perish and leave this
beauty.

CHAPTER V

LASCELLES ABERCROMBIE

LASCELLES ABERCROMBIE is a writer whose interests are strongly philosophical. His life has been lived as a university teacher of literature, and he is at present professor of literature at London University. His critical writings, unlike those of Drinkwater, are not of the descriptive, journalistic variety, but are serious studies of the basis of art and of poetry in particular.

The same spirit that we find in his *Theory of Art* of 1922 is also found in his critical study of Thomas Hardy of 1912, by far the best criticism of Hardy written, in which Hardy's works are considered against the background of his attitude to life.

Abercrombie's interest in poetry as a writer of it largely arises from his wish to present a philosophic and poetic view of life and love. His *Emblems of Love* (1912) presents different aspects of imperfect love, leading up to *The Eternal Wedding* which embodies Abercrombie's conception of the perfection of human love, in which the sexual and the spiritual are fused in harmony with the basic principle of life.

We come to Abercrombie's dramas, his *Four Short Plays*, *Deborah* and *Phoenix*, and find a surprising difference in subject. There are no pictures of ideal love in his dramas, indeed we might say that with the exception of Deborah herself there is no character who loves in a comparatively normal sexual fashion. Clearly "perfect love" with its complete satisfaction and fulfilment and virtue is an unsuitable subject for drama, for there is no conflict within it, and outside forces cannot harm it. But Abercrombie's dramatic characters are as far removed from this state as it is possible to be; they are people thwarted in their natural desires,

suffering from perversions of normal love, and living, many of them, in a world of torture. Partly this is due probably to a new attitude to the rustic and the treatment of him which has grown up in England during this century. For many years in literature the life and the habits of the simple rustic had been glorified. The eighteenth century with its *Deserted Village* and its *Pamela*, its simple-life novelists following after Rousseau, had glorified the life lived in the country by the poor and unknown. The voice of Crabbe pointing out the drab and cruel realities, made still more drab and cruel by Crabbe's own temperament, was a voice almost unheard.

Wordsworth with his search for the essential in life, his stress on nobility in suffering and the beauty of simplicity carried on this tradition in the nineteenth century. During the latter part of the nineteenth century, moreover, the life of the poor in towns presented such a horrifying spectacle, that men were inclined by contrast to build up in their own minds a happy glowing picture of life in the country, which was quite without relation to actual facts. In the twentieth century all is changed. Hardy himself, in the 'nineties, had to some extent prepared people's minds for it, for though the background of his novels presents a delightful picture of rustic life, with its closeness to the roots of life, the foreground, with its main characters, abounds in desertions, seductions, violent deaths and hatred of life's cruelties. Now, as we open modern books upon rustic life, we know that we shall find no idyllic picture of the peace of rustic life, but that the veil will be torn away and we shall see the sons of the soil in their hard cruel passions. The leader of the school is undoubtedly T. F. Powys, who uses this tradition in his powerful and beautiful novels. He has, however, unfortunately, followers of far less ability, and in addition critics receive with enthusiasm such a book as Rahel Sanzara's *Lost Child* in which almost every character is not only rustic, uninhibited and wicked, but also definitely insane.

Abercrombie's interest was turned to the rustic, probably not so much because he had any very close contact with him as that he felt with the other writer of poetic drama with

whom he is associated, Wilfred Wilson Gibson, that he must get away from the trappings of romantic drama and study a subject, simple in its setting, but poetic in its essence. In drama he understands best the art of the short play, and his *Four Short Plays* contains his best work. He is not, like Yeats or Gordon Bottomley, trying to express the dominant emotional tendency of one individual as expressed in action in the one crucial scene of his life.

In the play, *The Adder*, Abercrombie shows the peculiar power he has for creating the mood of horror, the kind of horror that is not subtly suggested but built up with solid and almost crude detail. For this horror Abercrombie needs nature as a background. The world of the drawing-room, the society of urban life, would serve as a distraction from the tortures of his obsessed characters, and it is therefore nature he chooses. But nature is not the calm unfolding mother, but something malignant and terrifying, and Abercrombie places his characters in their distorted attitudes of fear against this grim background. So in *The Adder* Newby says to Seth, the hero:

This half-light, the fall's quiet,
The harmless timber,—they all bide their time;
They are all sworn together, and against us.
Keep still a minute now, and catch your breath,
And let the hour have you. Can you not feel
The woods crouch like a beast behind your back?
And now look round Where's the beast gone that croucht?
But we're in the midst of something biding its time.

In *The Adder*, as in most of his plays, Abercrombie portrays an individual whose life is mastered by an overwhelming passion. Seth is a man whose soul has been "saved" but who is fascinated and repelled by what he regards as his mortal sin—excessive sexuality. He tells Newby, the other charcoal burner, that within his heart he keeps concealed an adder, which for him symbolizes that malign power in his sin and in nature, for it is an old superstition that adders are evil and powerful. To Seth's distraught mind the adder more than symbolizes his sin, it *is* his sin as it is death, and while

the adder is locked up his power for sin is kept within bounds. The dramatic conflict of the play is centred round the return of his daughter, the result of his sin. She has been brought up by his sister in complete seclusion, so that she might not even hear the name of sin. We see Seth's diseased attitude to life when he says that he watched her play but did not know:

Whether her wanton games,
Her merry tiptoe gait, were not in truth
Vile words prettily spoken.

We see the girl through Seth's contorted vision, not as an individual, but as a symbol. She is full-fruited innocence, ready to decay with the first touch. The Squire, the type of profligacy, meets the girl and she, attracted by some strange power of life, that she has not felt before, enquires with intense eagerness what sin is:

There's something in you that you feel like scarlet.
Is that not sin? So tell me what sin is.

Seth is appalled by the meeting, which the squire promises will not be the last, and he sees in the daughter the re-birth of his old sin. After the squire has gone the girl dances round in joy, singing of her changed life when within her will be:

Water of brooks in spring for happiness,
Scarlet fire for power and pride.

Her father reproaches her, but she will not accept the negation of life that is his one necessary way of salvation.

Is my heart stored with such a glowing light
And I must be afraid of it? I will not!
But if the power is in me, it shall burn
To freedom, yes, or fill me with the burning.

Seth can see no salvation for her except through death, and he releases the adder from its box and lets it bite her, so that she shall touch evil, which is the adder, only in death.

The Deserter also takes as its subject the pathological in sexual feeling. The play opens with the macabre, the talk between men and women who have watched the violent

death of a drunkard, and who thank their fate that they still enjoy the sweets of life. Against the brilliant glaring background of the garish brightness of day after the night stands the figure of Luther, the sadist, gentle and without harm in manner, but really the spider who says to his victim the widow:

All you will feel will be a kind of drowse
Settling down on you, gently, very gently—
Like sleepiness, when you're awake too long,
That seems to fasten cobwebs, thousands of them,
Round your limbs.

The woman has sent for her lover to protect her, and for her sake he has deserted his comrades going to the war. This has turned his love for her to hate, and when she confesses that she has hastened her husband's end by providing him with drink he leaves her to give himself up as a deserter. Her sexual loathing for Luther cannot save her from his gentle malign power. He tells her that he has her mind in his power as if he held a dandelion-clock, and that he can scatter her mind like the seed with one puff. The play ends with the woman, deserted by her lover, accepting in a dull trance the symbolic dandelion from Luther.

In both these plays Abercrombie has isolated his suffering characters from mankind, he has formed the world surrounding them into distorted shapes, and has put the mood of horror powerfully before us. In *The Adder*, Seth, the victim of an obsession, is seen against the sombre background of woods at dusk, where nature is felt to be malign. The background of *The Deserter* is brilliant with the light of day, and the soft and subtle persistent sadism of Luther is all the more terrible in that it is bright day, and there is no hiding-place for the woman and no escape from the web which is to enclose her. Both plays are achievements in the creation of atmosphere, but it may possibly be considered as a weakness that the hero of both plays is mentally abnormal to the point of insanity. The plays are successful examples of the use of the macabre, but probably Abercrombie has pushed his method to the furthest limit and there is no possibility of further development in this kind.

In *The End of the World* Abercrombie has chosen a subject of arresting possibilities, the sudden belief in a village that a comet is going to end the world. His villagers are not insane, and they are treated with a light hand. The Dowser who comes with the news of destruction causes dismay in his own mind and in those of others, because they feel that they have been cheated and that whatever happens to their own lives the world must go on, or beauty and the force of living is meaningless.

As the Dowser says:

O think!

Life that has done such wonders with its thinking
And never daunted in imagining;
That has put on the sun and the shining night,
The flowering of the earth and tides of the sea,
And irresistible rage of fate itself
Murder'd, uselessly murder'd.

Abercrombie is no melancholy, meditative philosopher with his sole human interest in the pathological. He loves the beauty of the earth and in parts of *The End of the World* he rouses up this feeling in us too.

Against the glory of the living earth stands the miserable thwarted figure of Huff, who rejoices in the end of the world, because it will mean a judgment on his lost wife and her love. But approaching annihilation makes him feel he has missed the meaning of life. He sees his niggardly goodness as

A caterpillar munching a cabbage-heart,
Always drudging further and further from
The sounds and lights of the world.

The only scrap of comfort he has is the lascivious thoughts that he once had in watching some half-dressed women working in a brine factory. The change of heart in Huff is good writing, but the end of the play is rather flat after the poetic picture of devastation which the Dowser has created. The lover Shale, alarmed, offers to Huff his wife again, and she, contemptuous, refuses them both. The end-

ing reminds one of the comedy of early English plays, of Heywood and his Merry Pardoner. But the mind of Abercrombie is too fastidious, too civilized, to create the robust comedy of the hearty rustic. The play has beautiful and brilliant passages, but it is not a complete whole.

Abercrombie has only written two three-act dramas, *Deborah* (1912), his first published play; the *Phoenix* (1925), his last. *Deborah*, until the publication of Abercrombie's collected works in 1930, was, to most people, sunk in the obscurity of Abercrombie's early works. It is a play of very mixed qualities and is chiefly remarkable for the dramatic qualities of the first act. Abercrombie takes as his subject fisher folk living in a marshy tidal island, who are suffering from an epidemic of cholera. His people are shown in the midst of death, awaiting the doctor. When he arrives the people fight for him. Saul, the most powerful, secures him and locks him in his house so that his boy may be saved. Deborah, the heroine of the play, pleads with Saul to let the doctor help her lover, David, but he is obdurate and the lover dies. Deborah comes to attack Saul, but she finds that he has died of the illness from which he has saved his son. Abercrombie's sense of a dramatic situation, his gift for depicting human beings obsessed with powerful emotion, for suggesting impending disaster, is well shown here. The whole play, however, is a very disjointed whole, and the second act is written in quite a different technique, while the third is almost completely detached from the first two.

Act Two is interesting in its writing, but it is undramatic in its texture. The time is many years later than the first, and Saul's son, Barnaby, is now grown up. He has been adopted by Deborah to save him from the rage of his neighbours for the sake of their dead. He and Miriam, David's sister, are now lovers, and Deborah has found a source of new life in this. Barnaby deserts Miriam and leaves her with child, and Deborah feels that her life, so painfully built up after her lover's death, is shattered again. The subject of this second act is not really a subject for drama at all, but for a novel. There is a great gulf of time between the first two acts, and

these great empty spaces in the course of the play are always unpleasing and undramatic. *The Winter's Tale*, *Milestones*, *Bittersweet*, the names pass through our minds, and as we think of these plays we see not a body but a skeleton whose joints are widely separated from each other. In reading a stretched-out play the effect is unpleasing, but it is more so in seeing such a play on the stage. In addition the act has as its subject the slow development of a situation through years, and this is really the subject matter of a novel, for a novelist can fill in the background and make it real, in a way that no dramatist can.

The third act of the drama is material, not for a tragedy, but for melodrama and for nothing else.

Melodrama is a good old English tradition, and dear, especially, to the English affections, but it is quite out of keeping with the style of writing in the first two acts. In the third act Miriam has just given birth to a dead son in Deborah's cottage on the marsh. There is a wild storm, and Miriam, now delirious, fears that the noise is the baying of hell hounds come for the soul of her baby. Barnaby returns mentally shattered by his experience in a shipwreck and demands shelter. The two rave alternately, until finally Miriam rushes out into the marsh, followed by Deborah, both to return no more. The play has become merely absurd. Grand Guignol, folk fantasy and melodrama have done their worst, and the promising first act of the play is of no avail.

Abercrombie has not achieved real success as a dramatist, in spite of his considerable dramatic gifts, because he lacks the power of sustaining a theme. He can keep to a high level in a one-act play, but in a three-act play the power of sustaining and of planning a theme flags, and the result is we find that the play has been dragged out too long. It is not, however, because his themes are too slight to bear expansion. The main theme of *Phoenix* is a real one, and connected vitally with the problem of human life. The subject is the difficulty of adjustment of the ageing man and the very young man to the matter of sexual love, and the acute suffering which comes to both old and young because of this. The old

man feels that the glamour of life has disappeared, and that only the love of a young girl can re-create it. The love of the old man is essentially sexual and yet essentially romantic (much more so than the love of an adult but younger man). He sees in sexual love the sole source of romance in life, and hence he clutches at it eagerly. His tragedy is that the object of his love, the young and beautiful girl, only sees the greedy sexual side, and this repels her; the marvellous romantic side merely bores her, because it is not her romance. The boy's first love is equally romantic, but less sexual; it is essential for his love that the object of it should seem a wonderful, romantic, untouched creature, and it is she who makes him feel that she makes life completely new again, so that he sees it truly for the first time. If he is disillusioned in his love-object love itself is suspect and life is twisted awry.

The subject of *Phænx* is the conflict between these two types, the old and the young, and in this play they are father and son, King and Prince.

The scene of the play is a town in North Greece in the time before the Trojan War, and the old king and his youthful and innocent son struggle for the possession of a slave girl. The girl, Rhodope, re-creates the world for the king as he says:

It is so strange to me I might have leapt
Clean into a new world, all that my mind
Has known till now, shrivels aside, as feebly
As a grey cobweb broken through.

He resents his son's capture of Rhodope, because:

When my mind
Could shine like immortality, you flung
Corruption on me again, and seized me down
From my bright freedom to be lapt again
In bird-lime, in the blinding filth of the world.

To the queen, the king's love is but an old man's infatuation and an offence to her dignity, and she determines to put an end to the situation by driving her son to fall in love with Rhodope. For the boy, to whom all life is radiant, love is an

added charm to his existence, but when he finds that Rhodope has been his father's mistress, life is sullied at the source, and he becomes an embittered man in a moment. These are the elements of tragedy, but the graceless Rhodope is no tragic figure. She is bored alike by the poetic speeches of the old man and by the rhapsodies of the young one. She prefers the soldiers who can take sex naturally as do the animals, and her relationship to her royal lovers belongs to the realm of comedy. Abercrombie in attempting to combine the bitter tragic feeling of Amyntor and Phoenix with the flippancy of Rhodope is attempting tragi-comedy, in which form the dramatist tries to achieve a perfect balance between the two. He is attempting the satyr-like form of *Measure for Measure*, in which the two halves of tragedy and comedy remain separate inharmonious elements.

But in Abercrombie's play there is no adequate bridge between the two. Phoenix leaves his parents for ever, Amyntor remains in humiliated helpless rage, Rhodope escapes her whipping and is to be sold to the next ship; the soldier, her lover, is whipped to relieve the king's feelings, and so the play ends. The atmosphere of the play is hard and brilliant sunshine with no shadows. The figures in the play are repellent, without the reserves which give life a little dignity. The problem Abercrombie states arouses our sympathy, awakens our thoughts, but we do not feel with the people in the play, only with the suffering in life outside the play.

Abercrombie is an interesting dramatist because of the problems he states, problems closely connected with modern life, and also because of his success in creating emotional tension concentrated in a single scene.

CHAPTER VI

JOHN DAVIDSON

JOHN DAVIDSON was a poet well-known in the 'nineties, whose supreme work in his own opinion was his tragedies and his long didactic poems, or "testaments," which appeared in the twentieth century. The "testaments" and his tragedies have long lain in obscurity, and to the average literary critic of his day, as represented by the writer of *The Times* memoir, his poetic career was warped by the development of a violent eccentricity which led him to produce an extraordinary series of poems and plays. Davidson's later work is imperfect in technique, and far from the "serenity of good poetry" that *The Times* reviewer seeks, but it is of more interest to us to-day than his *Yellow Book* lyrics, partly because of its spasmodic power, and partly because Davidson felt himself to be standing at the brink of an age when a new society and new standards of life would arise.

Davidson's life is intimately connected with his work. With some authors we feel their personality as a faint elusive shadow at the back of their work, but with others the personality of the author is a solid object placed in the foreground. Davidson's personality is always a prominent one, so much so that it is nearly always inevitable that one regards his work in terms of his personality. Much of his work is clearly autobiographical, and with the exception of a few of his lyrics, such as *Romney Marsh*, his poetic work is always surrounded, as with a frame, by his personality. The life history and the opinions of Shakespeare are of no value to us, since his personality is submerged and lost sight of in his imaginative work; it is however impossible to forget for long the dominating personalities of Milton, of Donne, or of

Davidson, because their personalities enclose their poetry, so that it cannot cover with wave after wave the rock-like angularities of their minds. Since this is so, in considering Davidson's dramatic work we must take into account every stage of his life and the various influences which built up his strange mind and character.

John Davidson was born in 1857, the son of a minister of the Evangelical Union, one of the many Scottish seceding churches. At the age of thirteen Davidson left school and entered the chemical laboratory of a sugar house in Greenock, in 1871 becoming assistant to the town analyst there. The following year he returned to school for two years, as a pupil teacher, and after that had one year of freedom as a student at Edinburgh University. From that time until 1889 Davidson spent eleven almost unbroken years in school-teaching in various places including Glasgow, Crieff and Greenock, changing schools frequently, since the work was uncongenial to him, until in 1889, four years after his marriage, he decided to give up schoolmastering for ever and to try his fortunes in London, unaided and unknown.

The environment in which Davidson lived as a child and as a young man was of the greatest importance to him, for he felt its influence on him as a kind of illness from which he could never recover. It is difficult to picture successfully the intellectual and moral atmosphere in which Davidson lived. Even to-day Scotland stands far behind England in emancipation from outworn intellectual ideas and moral taboos. The profit and loss side of religion is still stressed, and it is possible for the Scotch daily papers to publish letters seriously stating the belief that shareholders of railway stock have suffered depreciation of their holding as a direct judgment upon the introduction of Sunday excursions. Davidson himself says, in his autobiographical poem, *Ballad in Blank Verse of the Making of a Poet* that

... this was in the North, where Time stands still
And Change holds holiday, where Old and New
Welter upon the border of the world,
And savage faith works woe.

This poem, published in *Ballads and Songs* of 1894, is of the greatest importance in considering Davidson's life and work, for like most of his poems it is largely autobiographical and it deals with his early revolt against religion and what he wished to do with life after he cut himself free from the beliefs of his parents. Davidson in his poem represents an adolescent boy being faced by the religious doctrines advocated by his parents, the sanctification by the Blood, Predestination, the concentration on the spiritual defined within narrow limits. The world opens out new and beautiful before the boy, the beauties of the mountains and of the woods around the Clyde are before him, and he feels the narrow concentration of his parents, the shutting out of all things, except the Cross and Heaven and Hell, to be a negation of life. The struggle in his mind is the more intense because he loves his parents, and admires, as one of god-like qualities, his father. Because of his love for his parents he compromises and gives the outward sign of allegiance by going to the Communion table:

Then to the table of the Lord he went,
Ghastly, with haunted eyes that shone, and limbs
That scarcely bore him, like a heretic
Led to the chamber where tormentors stood
Muffled and silent, earnest to explore,
With cunning flames and cords and engines dire,
The sunken wells of pain, the gloomy gulfs
Obscurely wallowing in the souls of men.

He feels an analogy between this situation and the entry of a victim to the chamber of torture, since the feeling of constraint upon Davidson's powerful, sensitive mind was torture to him. The compromise, the denial of the truth that he knows, is to him a kind of instantaneous damnation, a sin whose stain shall never be removed:

Like husks of corn
The bread, like vitriol the sip of wine!
I eat and drink damnation to myself
To give my father's troubled spirit peace.

After the service the boy rushes out to the Firth, to the nature he longs for, and proclaims his rebellion against God:

Henceforth I shall be God: for consciousness
Is God: I suffer: I am God: this Self,
That all the universe combines to quell,
Is greater than the universe; and I
Am that I am.

He goes back to tell the good news to his father, but his father dies with a broken heart, accepting the will of God that his son is predestined to Hell. The boy, horror-struck, seeks his consolation in Nature, abandons all creeds, and decides to be the impersonal gatherer of experience:

A soulless life that angels may possess
Or demons haunt.

He is to identify himself with nature and express the whole universe in his poems. Above all he is to know all experience and feel all emotions, for—

men to know,
Women to love are waiting everywhere.

The two ideals that the boy has in this poem, first to create a new religion of which he himself shall be the centre as man, and, secondly, to cast off all creeds and theories and gather up and express all experience, remained with Davidson throughout his life. He longed to destroy the past, to tear away outworn beliefs, to destroy the power of dogma in the human mind. He longed to build a new religion with man, and, above all, man as revealed in Davidson, as its centre. His other desire was to take all experience to himself, and, in particular, the magnificent stirring experience of action and the blood rather than that of the mind. In the ballad we have described, the hero gives up the first ambition in order to take unto himself the second, the full unrestrained experience of life. Davidson's tragedy as a man and as a writer is that he could never forego the first ideal in order to attain to the second. There is an essential conflict between the two ideals, and there was an essential conflict in Davidson's whole life.

He strove to be the poet expressing life and not dogma, to be the harp of poetic experience blown through by every wind, to be Shakespeare, the non-moralist, rather than Milton, the moralist; but the bonds of the Scotsman, and of the Scotsman of the nineteenth century, moreover, were too strong for him. He remained to the last bound by creeds, casting off the creed of his youth, of religion, only to take upon himself another creed, a yet more binding one, the creed of "Action."

Davidson's writing, up to the time he left for London in 1889, is remarkable for its promise and for qualities of light-heartedness, wit and fantasy, which are almost completely lost in the later Davidson. He produced two novels, or long short stories, *The North Wall* (1885) and *Perfervid* (1890), in both of which the farcical element is strong, in the first book with incomplete success; but in *Perfervid* there is vigour, restraint and a very considerable gift for narration. Five plays were produced at this time, *Bruce*, a chronicle play (1886), *Smith*, a tragic farce (1883), and three comedies (1889). Throughout his life Davidson had the greatest enthusiasm for Elizabethan plays; the age of Shakespeare to him was the last age in which men could create imaginatively in drama. Somewhat naturally, then, his early poetic comedies are on the whole too derivative, too much under the sway of the poetic luxuriance of the Elizabethan age. The young Davidson must have flown with delight to the ardours of the Elizabethan, far from the dusty battleground of the religious teaching of his home and the philosophical contests of his university.

Scaramouch in Naxos, the best of the comedies, uses a gift for comedy which appeared in Davidson's dramatic work in this period and in *Perfervid*, and which unfortunately disappeared in later life, through the hard pressure of life's difficulties, and because the serious dogmatic Scotch side of him gradually became more prominent. The play is described as a pantomime, and by using this form Davidson is able to put romantic passages side by side with satiric fantasy. He

has the idea of introducing a modern impresario, the Showman, with Scaramouch and Harlequin, into the company of gods and classical mythical beings. Scaramouch comes to Naxos with the idea of capturing Bacchus and Ariadne and of taking them to the modern world to make money for him in an entertainment. He is persuaded to take Silenus who pretends to be Bacchus. The real Bacchus appears with Ariadne, exposes Silenus and turns Scaramouch into an ape, departing in his glory and beauty as a god. There are scenes of considerable beauty and charm where Bacchus and Ariadne appear with their chariot, and where the two lovers, Ione and Sarmion, express their love for each other, scenes reminiscent of various literary flavours, Elizabethan and Shelleyan. These scenes have their individual charm and Davidson is capable, even here, of laughing at himself. He gives to Silenus the song:

Dance and sing, we are eternal;
Let us still be mad with drinking:
'Tis a madness less infernal
Than the madness caused by thinking.

with the comment: "I know another song like that; but if drunkenness is no excuse for plagiarism, what is?" The Scaramouch part of the play is a light satire on a modern civilization which is ready to commercialize anything, even to deities and planets. In his efforts to secure the unusual, Scaramouch has already hired a fairy, shut up six theatres and bought the Crystal Palace, only to find that the fairy was about the size of a small tadpole, so that the crowd wrecked the palace and went away. Scaramouch attempts to seize Silenus, but he and his sailors are mesmerized and cannot move, and this Scaramouch interprets in terms of the theatre:

First Sailor: Our timbers are rooted.

Second Sailor: Our flippers are frozen to our sides.

Scaramouch: Good, my men, I shall find you an engagement as supers when we go home; but this is not the stage.

Finally Scaramouch and Silenus and Glaucus settle down to

discussing life in the modern world. Silenus is astonished to and that men are still pleased with the plan of buying and selling:

Silenus: And is money still the cure for all the ills of life? . . . And the great and glorious institution of rich and poor, good spick-and-span divinity—is the world not tired of that gift of the gods yet?

Glaucus: This is empty railing: there must always be rich and poor.

Silenus: Let the rich hope so.

The comedy in this play is slight and has much of the qualities of the young man's fancy and satiric wit about it. It is never heavy, and it is always subordinated to the whole conception of the pantomime. Davidson himself always thought well of the play, and it is like in spirit to the Elizabethan comedy at its lightest, a mixture of poetry, fantasy and satire.

Davidson's "tragic farce," *Smith* (1886), is a much less mature production than *Scaramouch*; it is the work of the earnest adolescent rather than of the brilliant young man. Yet it is more in the direct line of Davidson's work leading up to the *Mammon* plays, and it is of importance as autobiography. The play opens with a conversation between some young university men, who describe themselves with pride as those

Whose thinking's done, whose automatic mind
Strikes the same absolute response each time,
A man who knows the best of everything;
Consummate, bland, whom novelty annoys.

They discuss two unusual young men, Hallowes, a poet, who has given up school-teaching because it means: "turning children out like ninepins, each as doleful and as wooden," the other, Smith, a masterful, magnetic and remarkable person. Hallowes and Smith are clearly projections of Davidson as he sees himself. Hallowes kills himself, choosing death rather than the struggle with want which would degrade his talent. Again and again in his writing Davidson asserts the right of man to kill himself when by disease, or by approaching old age, life has lost its power and charm, and following

his own doctrine, he drowned himself off the Cornish coast at the age of fifty-two. The attitude of Hallows to the bland self-satisfied superiority of his acquaintances, his outburst of:

You sots, you maggots, shavings, asteroids!
A million of you wouldn't make a man!
Out, or I'll strike you, monkeys, mannikins!!

reflects the feeling of Davidson himself as a rather raw Scotch youth, conscious of his powers and of his lack of polish. We get some indication of the exasperation he must have felt against people more bland and more stupid than himself. Part of the violence of Davidson's later work may be accounted for by the fact that he never completely lost sight of his own lack of polish. The magnetic Smith—the other half of Hallows—has not found the meaning of the universe as have Davidson's later heroes, for it is still

a flying shuttle,
Weaving a useless web of mystery
That shrouds itself!

He is, however, not less strident than they are in demanding the destruction of things existing. The evil spells of the world must be destroyed, that is, creeds, science, philosophy, literature ("thought's palace—prison fair") and society ("the mud wherein we stand up to the eyes"). Smith is like the later heroes also in that he regards as supremely important the first feelings of love. He and Magdalen, the wealthy and betrothed daughter of a squire, instantaneously recognize their love for each other when they meet. He commands her to obey her nature, not authority, to love him and to help him in his work of destruction. Her father thinks that she is mad and tries to stop the elopement, but Smith decides that their moment of perfect happiness is come and the lovers leap into a precipice. The defiant language of Smith is laughable at times, and the play is well called a tragic farce, but yet, childish though the play is as a whole, it has a certain air of power about it, a magnificent defiance of commonsense which has its appeal.

In 1890 Davidson left Scotland, never to return there to

live, and settled in London. The change in intellectual atmosphere was a great one, and it would probably have been better for Davidson's æsthetic development if the change had come before 1890, for he was by then already thirty-three. For thirty-three years Davidson had lived in the neighbourhood of Glasgow, a rebel against, and yet influenced by, the Scotch ideal of life. This ideal is still accepted in Scotland to-day, although in a modified degree only. It involves suspicion of the natural activities and desires of man's body and mind, belief in restraint for its own sake, a restraint which involves not only a personal code of conduct, but also interference with the private lives of other people. The particular kind of philosophy produced in Glasgow, that of Caird, is concerned with the moral law rather than with the nature of the universe, just as the religion known by Davidson was concerned with the salvation of particular souls rather than with the worship of God. Part of Davidson longed to cast all these things from him with his years of uncongenial school-teaching, and in his new life as a writer to taste of life fully, without moral laws and prohibitions. Davidson did, as we gather from some of his work, plunge into life, tasting indiscriminately and rather too freely, but however much he might cry for experience and seize hold of it with eager hands, the dogmatically moral side of him was always ready to comment savagely on his own imprudence and to denounce the world for its wrong-headed misery.

The literary world into which Davidson entered was the world of the 'nineties, the 'nineties of *The Yellow Book*, and in this periodical he published some of his lyrics. But although he published in *The Yellow Book* his sympathies can never at any time have been very closely bound up with an art-for-art's-sake group. The doctrinal word within him moved too strongly at all times to allow of the detachment of art. Beardsley supplied an admirable illustration to his *Scaramouch*, however, and Davidson's emphasis on sexual experience has something, though not very much, in common with the tenets of Symons and some of his group. But although the 'nineties are associated in people's minds with Wilde,

Symons and the æsthetic movement generally, it was an age rich with many divergent streams of literature. It was the age of Hardy, of Wells and Shaw and the Fabian group, of Kipling and Henley and the Imperialists, of Stevenson and the novel of adventure, of Gissing, the gloomy realist, the time too of the Celtic revival. The 'nineties are in fact the beginning of a new age, of the present one. The solid earth they knew was beginning to shake under people's feet, just as it shakes under ours, only its tremor then was perceptible to the few, while to-day all men can perceive that it rocks and that civilization is no longer stable as it seemed to be in the past. The growth of industry and wealth, the extension of empire in the middle of the nineteenth century had seemed to make England a solidly successful object in the middle of a fixed universe, and the "economic law" was accepted as sanctified by God and Nature. Carlyle was one of the few people to protest that all was not well with a world becoming increasingly mechanized with no control except the blind control of wealth seekers.

By Carlyle, Davidson was undoubtedly strongly influenced in his youth, although later he speaks of his creed as "a dusty way to death" and the "dull hell of the drill sergeant." Even at that stage in his life—that of *The Theatrocrat*—Davidson acknowledged that Carlyle was seeking a new imaginative background for life, when he urged people to penetrate through the appearance of things to the God-essence behind them, and to choose leaders, the nature of whose greatness is that they can tap this stream of life. Carlyle saw that civilization was becoming an uncontrollable machine in which individual life would be crushed, and although he was followed to some extent in this belief by Ruskin, it was not until the 'nineties that literature in general reflected deep-rooted discontent with modern mechanized civilization and a more profound pessimism directed against the nature of the universe itself.

Different temperaments showed this feeling of pessimism and suspicion of the existing state of things in different ways. Hardy's pessimism attacks the basis of existence, in *Jude*

The Obscure if not in all his works, where the general attitude is that life is so incomprehensibly cruel that existence itself is a mistake, and it would be better for human beings never to have been born. Writers such as Pater, Wilde and Symonds, with their concentration upon the æsthetic, sensual and sexual joys of the individual, are deliberately shutting off from their gaze the wider world of ordinary people, to whom circumstances or their own nature make such accumulated happiness an impossibility. They shut off this world precisely because the sight of the mechanized world in which exist poverty, sickness and wastage of life and life's joys appalled them. In the 'nineties Bernard Shaw and the Webbs and the Fabian group were realizing that in England there was the most widespread and unpleasant form of poverty there had ever been, and they were preaching the cure of reform of social institutions; while Wells, after a brief alliance with the Fabians, put forth his visions of a new man, created by a new education.

These attempts at systematized social reform and control of economic forces made no appeal to Davidson. He was at all times the born aristocrat and individual, conscious of his superiority to men in general and unwilling that the chosen few of intellect and personality should be put on a level with mankind. He introduces Socialists into his Mammon plays, but only to show by argument how futile and degrading their theories seem to the heroic master of life, Mammon.

Davidson in the 'nineties was not a reformer with a positive plan of action, but he was interested in the world of poverty and misery he saw before him, as a symptom of the decay which he saw to exist in the world's beliefs and institutions. In *A Rosary* he speaks of Hood's *Song of the Shirt* as in its place the most important and most terrible poem in the English language. He claims that the subject of English poetry for some time to come must be abject poverty, but it is not reforming zeal that leads him to this conclusion, for charities and poor-law institutions are, according to him, only skins over the cancer, for: "The world cannot be changed until it falls back into the sun." In his attitude towards

poverty he is very much like his contemporary, George Gissing. Gissing's sombre powerful novels, his *Grub Street*, his *Odd Women*, are pictures of a terrible kind of civilization in which men and women are sunk into a bog of poverty and misery, where there is no joy, no sense of living except in moments of intoxication from drugs or alcohol. But although Gissing shared in this poverty and was a spectator at close quarters, he was essentially and always the middle-class man watching the specimens of a lower race in their misery, and in his later book, *Demos*, it is clear that he believes it is not circumstances which hold the poor in their morass; rather it is the combination of circumstances and the essential nature of these beings that makes them cling to their own misery, and causes their fate to be irredeemable.

In his *Ballads and Songs* of 1894 Davidson inserted poems written about the life of poverty, such as *Thirty Bob a Week*, a poem in ballad form, in which a clerk describes the narrow privations of his life. But though these ballad poems of contemporary life had a certain success at the time, Davidson is by temperament too detached from his fellows to be capable of identifying himself with the joys and sorrows of the clerk or of any particular human being of whom he is writing. Davidson's clerk speaks affectingly of his wife:

But you never hear her do a growl or whine,
For she's made of flint and roses very odd,

and after reflection on the reason for the struggle for existence, the clerk concludes:

But the thing is daily done by many and many a one,
And we fall, face forward, fighting, on the deck.

It is because it is impossible for Davidson to identify himself with one of the underlings of the world—for the clerk admits that he is one by temperament—that the poem inclines strongly towards sentimentality. Davidson must either be sentimental and talk about poverty from a distance, or else be still detached but gazing with horrified wonder at the victims of a mechanized civilization, victims suffering from so horrible a fate that only the wreck of this civilization

and its ideals can free them. So in *The Testament of a Man Forbid* (1901) he sees these victims:

I saw besides in fields and cities hordes
Of haggard people soaked in filth and slime
Wherewith they fed the faded earth the while
Their souls of ordure stank; automata
That served machines whose tyrannous revolt
Enthralled their lords, . . .
Wretches and monsters that were capable
Of joy and sorrow once, their bodies numbed,
Their souls deflowered, their reason disendowed
By noisome trades, or at the furnaces,
In drains and quarries and the sunless mines;
And myriads upon myriads, human still
Without redemption drudging till they died.

This is modern industrial England seen through the eyes of Carlyle, of Gissing, of James Thomson, of Davidson himself. Something had to be done with this gloomy vision in the 'nineties. It was possible to gaze on it with hopeless gloom, as did James Thomson and Gissing, to try to remedy it by propaganda and legislation as did the Fabians, to shut it out as did the æsthetes or to turn away from domestic problems as did the Imperialists.

To Kipling and Henley and their followers, conscious of the general feeling of unrest and of dissatisfaction with things as they were, some policy of action seemed imperative. These preachers of action disliked the intellectual dreariness of the scientific theories of the day. They had in fact a general suspicion of thought of every kind and of the life of the intellect. The idea of the highest good being obtained in the full living of every sensuous experience was still more abhorrent to them. The modern ideal of life was felt to be too complicated, and for this reason Kipling's heroes are simplified human beings, with all the annoyingly disconcerting idiosyncrasies of mankind removed. Subtlety of feeling and intellect is not present and instead we have a straightforward code of life and morality. The boy when young is controlled

by older boys, so that in turn later he may control other boys. Kipling describes the ideal of such a school in one of his stories: "the school boy was not encouraged to dwell on its emotions, but rather to keep in condition." The boy is to learn not to think or to feel, but to act. He is born into the world to administer justice fairly to his inferiors, first in age and then in race. The duty of the white man is to sacrifice his comfort for the task of imposing the ideals of the white race upon the brown and the black, in so far as they are capable of accepting them, and the white man must regard the other races as children who need to be looked after. Imaginative understanding, anthropological knowledge, intellectual ability are not necessary, but self-sacrificing devotion, a high standard of personal integrity, and perfect physical bravery are essential. One of the advantages of the Kipling creed to the anxious disturbed minds of the men of the 'nineties was that it substituted new problems for that of England itself. It gave to the governing classes of England a simple code of duty to be followed, instead of an intellectual problem only to be solved by radical changes in the conception of the state, if not of life itself. Kipling's Imperialism and his conception of the Empire appealed greatly to the spirit of adventure and romance in people; it opened up to them the possibilities of pioneering in strange lands, of participating in deeds of violence and of conquest, of risking their lives for a romantic cause.

The other leader of the "Take Action" school was Henley, poet, man of letters, and editor of the *Scots Observer* and *National Observer*, papers advocating, amongst other things, Conservatism, an active Empire policy, the firm hand with Ireland, adamant opposition to Women's Suffrage. Henley's creed was Action at all costs. The kind of action that was to be taken was, with him, not specified, but was to be violent. On the coming of the Boer War, Henley's somewhat diffused violent emotions were concentrated on one object, the war and England's victory in it. In his poem of 1900, *For England's Sake*, he gives a picture of England sunk in sloth

and ease, and of the gods in their goodness sending war,
 "The Red Angel, the Awakener." England, after her victory,
 puts away her idle dreams and reaches heights where

the weak live not.

But only the strong have leave to strive, and suffer and achieve!

In *Pro Rege Nostro* not only does Henley welcome war as a god, but he asserts the divine right and duties of England. He speaks of the "one Flag" and the "one Race" and the duty of England to watch and guard with "the mailed hand" the other nations. England is, moreover, not only the "Chosen Daughter of the Lord," but the "Spouse-in-Chief of the ancient Sword."

The doctrines of Kipling and Henley appealed greatly to Davidson. The simplicity of ideal, the call for action, and the romance of empire found in Kipling's work are reflected in such a poem as *St. George's Day* (1896), where we find a naïve expression of the same gospel:

I'll spare no flourish of its praise,
 Where'er our flag floats in the wind
 Order and justice dawn and shine.
 The dusky myriads of Ind,
 The swarthy tribes far south the line,
 And all who fight with lawless law,
 And all with lawless men who cope
 Look hitherward across the brine,
 For we are the world's forlorn hope.

Menzies: That makes my heart leap up! Hurrah!
 We are the world's forlorn hope.

But Davidson was probably more influenced by Henley with his robust rollicking writing, and his revolt against intellectual standards on the plea that the more you think the less you act. Action, incidentally, is usually exalted by those who, from physical disability, such as Henley and R. L. Stevenson suffered, are prevented from joining in ordinary life, or else by the essentially introverted meditative type, such as was D. H. Lawrence. Henley, and also Kipling, held up for admiration the active he-man, with a tacit underlying dis-

approval of the intellectual man. Davidson goes further than this.

In *The Testament of a Man Forbid* he urges the workers to cast aside religion, philosophy and art, the chains of the past, and commands them to

behold

The earth; life, death, and day and night!

Think not the things that have been said of these.

In *The Theatrocrat* he sees the world as full of monuments to the dead past, the cathedrals as monuments of a dead faith, academies of dead art, universities of dead learning, and banks about to be monuments of dead finance. In his dedication to this play addressed "*To the generation knocking at the door,*" he gives his creed of action:

Break—break it open; let the knocker rust:
Consider no 'shalt not,' and no man's 'must':
And, being entered, promptly take the lead,
Setting aside tradition, custom, creed. . . .
High hearts and youth are destiny enough,
The mystery and the power enshrined in you
Are old as time and as the moment new:
And none but you can tell what part you play,
Nor can you tell until you make assay,
For this alone, this always, will succeed,
The miracle and magic of the deed.

Here is action deified indeed, although what exact form the action is to take is with Davidson, as with many exalters of the deed, obscure. He does however glory in the sword as does Henley with his "Red Angel," for in his plays war is to him not only a means to an end but a positive good. Also Henley's doctrine of England having a divine right to exercise authority over other races appealed to Davidson very strongly. Davidson had been born one of a chosen people, dedicated to and chosen by God. He lost his birthright as one of God's chosen people by abandoning religion, but he gained a new right as one of Nature's chosen race, the British. The theory of the destiny of the British fits in too with the inborn feeling of the Scot that discipline and

authority in themselves are blessings, and that interference with other people's lives is a duty, a feeling which arises largely through the past religious history of the race and that even yet has not been outgrown. Finally in addition to the haughtiness of race, Davidson had an ever-present consciousness of his pre-eminence over other people, over the foolish mass of which the world in general consisted, because he felt himself to be a man of genius.

During the years 1890-1900 Davidson produced no original drama. His energies were concentrated on a hard struggle for his livelihood, and journalism, novel writing and lyric writing were more remunerative than writing plays which in all probability would never be produced. So in this period we have Davidson's novels, amongst them *Perfervid* and *Baptist Lake*, and his volumes of songs, such as *In a Music Hall*, *Fleet Street Eclogues* and *Ballads and Songs*. Encouraged by the considerable esteem in which his lyrical work was held Davidson turned his attention to poetic plays and from 1898 to 1900 he wrote three, *Godfrida*, *Self's the Man* and *The Knight of the Maypole*.

The Knight of the Maypole stands apart from the other plays of Davidson's maturity for its light-heartedness and clarity of construction. It is in the same tradition as *Scaramouch*, Davidson's early play, that of Elizabethan comedy which mingles romance and humour, verse and prose. The story is placed in the reign of Charles II. Gabriel, a landowner, returns in rags from exile to find that his land has been seized by his cousin, and that his lady love is admired and courted by King Charles. He is made the Lord of the Maypole by the king and given rule over lovers. There are woodland scenes of considerable charm in which he joins young lovers in spite of the parents' opposition—one of Davidson's theories being the sanctity of first love: "The fairest vision to be seen on earth." The lighter part of the play is written with charm and grace and the whole play has a light and happy air. The hero, Gabriel, corresponds to Davidson's later heroes, for he is overcast in temperament, powerful and dynamic, though in a lesser degree than the

others; he is not, however, sufficiently overpowering to darken the play.

Davidson's sympathy with Gissing, his sombre view of human life as lived by the masses, did not tend to make him a realist in his plays. The "Take Action" school of Henley and Kipling is after all romantic in essence. It is a romantic view of man to see him as a simple, forceful, uncomplicated creature; it is a romantic view of war to see it as glorious and good. Thus all Davidson's plays are unashamedly romantic in treatment and very often in subject. The prologue to *Godfrida* takes the form of a conversation between the Poet and his Interviewer. The Poet says he chooses romance: "I mean by romance the essence of reality. Romance does not give the bunches plucked from the stem; it offers the wine of life in chased goblets." He says that he takes men and women as he knows them, but turns them into people of the past. The play deals with the romantic love at first sight of Siward, a young warrior, for Godfrida, one of the queen's maidens. Their antagonists are powerful and envious, the queen desiring Siward for herself, and Isembert, her prime minister, being envious both of Godfrida and of the queen's power; but the lovers triumph. *Godfrida* is the least interesting of Davidson's plays, for the people have no individuality of their own, nor are they very closely bound up with the fundamental feelings of Davidson's own mind. *Self's the Man* is more closely connected with Davidson's later plays, for "Action" is its theme:

Be your own star, for strength is from within;
And one against the world will always win

is the motto that introduces the play.

Self's the Man has its subject in the rivalry between Urban and Lucian for the throne of Lombardy. Urban is chosen and becomes a despot in order to make his country first in the world. He feels that

There lies
A ruthless obligation on our souls
To be despotic for the world's behoof

and this despotism is to be made complete by war. Urban takes as his wife the beloved of his rival, and gives up his "affinity" love, his mistress and a slave. Forces are too strong for him and he is exiled. Years after as an old man he sees a statue put up to his memory by a devoted daughter, and dies in the arms of his mistress, Saturnia. The reason for his downfall is his abandonment of Saturnia, for great men should be above the opinion of others:

But having done dishonour to myself
In the great passion by which the world endures,
A bridge without a keystone, all my hopes
Crumble to dust and vanish in the gulf.

There is the same theme as in most of Davidson's plays, that of the need for a man to be strong in action and to seize on his "affinity" love, but the play is much less straightforward than is *Godfrida*. There is some dramatic tension in the relationship of Urban with his wife, for though she belongs by "affinity" to Lucian and loves him after her marriage, her relationship with her husband and the birth of her child bind her finally more strongly to her husband than to her lover.

CHAPTER VII

DAVIDSON'S LATER DRAMAS

WE now come to the period in Davidson's life which in his opinion was the most vital in his poetic work, the last decade from 1901-10, the period which produced his "testaments" and tragedies. Of these Davidson says in his Epilogue to *The Triumph of Mammon* that they "came into being with a profound satisfaction beyond delight, beyond ecstasy." There are five "testaments," or long imaginative didactic poems, testaments of a *Vivisector*, of a *Man Forbid*, of a *Prime Minister* and *The Testament of John Davidson* of 1908, one of the last poems he wrote before his death in 1909. These "testaments," though in parts tedious and unnecessarily long, are highly original and strongly imaginative pieces of writing and they expound the same theme as do the later tragedies. It is necessary, according to this theme, for men to give up all their old modes of thought and their creeds and above all to destroy Christianity completely. Instead there is to be substituted a belief in the universality of matter, the plants, the stars, the animals; men are all formed of the same matter, and there is no world except the one we know. Heaven, Hell, God, Christ, and, above all, sin are conceptions which have no basis of truth in them when once the unity of matter is accepted. Man is more important than anything else in the universe because in him alone is matter self-conscious, and by degrees this belief led Davidson to the inevitable conclusion that since he was the only man conscious of the unity of matter, therefore he was the greatest of all men. *The Testament of John Davidson* is woven round this belief of Davidson's, a last triumphant and magnificent defiance of the world, combined with a pathetic surrender to the forces of fate. The force of life is to be

adored and the unforgivable sin is the denial of life, which forms the subject matter of a luridly sadistic episode in the *Testament of a Prime Minister*. Christianity is hated and feared, chiefly because its admiration for chastity and virginity is taken as a direct negation of life. All activities in life are to be indulged in fully and freely, including deeds of violence, war and bloodshed, for the direct expression of feeling in any action increases the power of life. The supreme form of life is found in the feeling of power in men in sexual experience and of joy in women in this experience and in conception. All forms of life, stars, animals, plants, as well as men, rejoice in this function, though man is supreme in this also because of his self-consciousness.

Davidson's greatest desire was to write plays with the new imaginative background of the new universe, which should be accepted by the theatres and make known to all men his individual vision. His interest in drama was awakened early in life at Greenock, but in his early years in London he showed no interest in the actual theatre and he says himself that during five years in London he only visited the theatre once. No one of Davidson's original plays was produced in London, although two of his adaptations from the French were performed, one in which Mrs. Patrick Campbell took the chief part being a considerable success. In an imaginary conversation between an Actor-Manager and a Playwright an account is given of the fate of the writer's plays, which presumably refers to Davidson's own plays. The author adapted foreign plays successfully and he published eight plays. Four of these plays were approved by those who commissioned them and the production was arranged, two of them eventually being rehearsed, one in America and one in England, yet none of them eventually appeared in the theatre. It is a marvel, Davidson adds, that the author has not died of chagrin. Davidson did indeed feel very bitterly the neglect of what he speaks of as "the likeliest poetic plays written for the English stage in these times," and above all because he felt that if he had won an established reputation by the theatrical production of his early works, his tragedies

and "testaments" and the doctrine that they contain would have been received with enthusiasm. By the time that *The Theatrocrat* and the *Mammon* plays were written Davidson was looking less and less to the theatre, and his tragedies as a whole would be difficult to produce, because of the length of the didactic speeches and the looseness of structure of the plays, while the censor would object to several of the scenes in the *Mammon* plays.

The Theatrocrat (1905), the first of the tragedies, was commented on with disapproval by the writer of *The Times* memoir after Davidson's death. He said that it was an "extraordinary play" in which irreligious beliefs jostled drunken actors, American music-hall managers, and erring women. The hero of *The Theatrocrat* is a famous actor-manager who produces *Troilus and Cressida* to save his future, but is ruined by it. He is financed again by his friend, the revolutionary church bishop, who denounces Christianity and preaches Davidson's creed of materialism to an indignant crowd who storm the theatre and kill him. The actor-manager himself is murdered by his wife's lover and both men die proclaiming the new doctrine.

Davidson had always a great admiration for Ibsen, and in *A Rosary* his criticism of his plays is acute, although in the preface to *Godfrida* he says that mere imitation of Ibsen would never lead anywhere. Yet the opening scenes of *The Theatrocrat* are somewhat reminiscent of Ibsen in their subject matter. In these scenes is shown the relationship of Tristram and his wife, both bound by the sexual fervour of their past married life. Now that this fervour is over Lady Sumner tries to persuade her husband that he must take poison with her if his production of *Troilus and Cressida* is a failure. She reminds him that in years past they slept with the poison ready under their pillows in case failure and poverty should overcome them. Sir Tristram, however, does not share her morbid enthusiasm; and he tells the Bishop, Gervaise, his confidant, that he wishes for a divorce because since the sexual life of his wife is over and all their four children are dead, the marriage is also dead. Lady Sumner hates

her husband, because of their relationship in the past, and tries to force him to take poison by making the audience hiss the play and so ruining him completely. Her loathing of life and her desire to engulf her husband as well as herself in death are caused by the fact that she feels that her marriage has made her guilty of sin and that her life is now a living death:

Naked my soul is, and it cannot breathe
For lack of air, and it consists in sin . .
Dead sin, it cannot now commit.

When the Bishop comes to suggest a partnership with her husband in presenting his message to the world he tries to build up again Lady Sumner's ruined life. He tells her that because everything is matter God is an ugly dream, which once may have had significance. Everything must be as it is, for

It serves no purpose, it is beautiful:
That is the whole.

Death does not exist, but her children are still alive as part of the universe. Since there can be no sin, Lady Sumner's great burden can be removed and all anguish and torture of the mind must cease for everyone:

There never can be need
For terror, doubt, or agony of mind
In presence of a sinless Universe.

The feelings and opinions of Lady Sumner and of the Bishop illustrate some of Davidson's fundamental feelings. The woman feels that sexual emotion or action is *sin*, and her husband says that her marriage would only have been justified if the children had lived. Davidson himself clearly feels that a woman needs sanctification in marriage, and this is brought about by the existence of children; it is this feeling of his which accounts in part for the violence of his language against contraception, a topic occurring several times in his later works. There is one other way in which a woman may be sanctified and this is by union with her first "affinity" love. We find both these themes in Davidson's novel, *Baptist*

Lake, where the father of the family likes his daughters to have their confinements in his own home, so that three pregnant daughters are living there at the same time, together with their pregnant mother of forty-five. The son, still a schoolboy, is to be married immediately to his first "affinity" love, and she hopes forthwith to conceive a son.

It is clear that the root of Davidson's opposition to Christianity lies in his feeling about sexual life. For Davidson, much as he may glorify it, this was always associated with guilt, and he hoped by destroying all belief in Christian doctrines with their emphasis on purity and chastity to do away with this feeling of guilt, both in himself and in others. He felt that to escape from guilt he must escape from the universe as conceived up till then into a sinless one. And in his sinless universe he accepted Schopenhauer's fundamental principle of life, that of sex, present in all forms of life, but supremely, in Davidson's opinion, in man, the self-conscious.

Lady Sumner is won over by Gervaise's message and goes away to find peace in cloistered woods. But there she looks round the world and sees the beasts and birds and insects pairing, and feels that the secret and meaning of the universe is this sin, this love. She returns to the theatre and finds Groom, the actor, once her lover, and dies, self-poisoned in his arms, rejoicing in the meaning of the universe to her—her "week of sin" with Groom before her marriage.

Sir Tristram himself is more complicated than most of Davidson's heroes. The theatre is his passion and perfect art his desire, but he feels that he lives in a dead age, and, for this reason, his art becomes partially commercialized. Groom, the gifted but drunken actor, reproaches him for his alliance with the church and respectability. As he says:

The Bishop of St. James's
Is fast your friend: and nonconformists—Hell!
Have sung your praise in public.

Tristram is not the usual type of popular actor, for he realizes the emptiness of contemporary drama, dead like everything else—art, learning, religion, finance. "Is not the

whole world bankrupt?" is his summary. Gervaise's doctrine of materialism gives his life a new aim, so that he puts death behind him and joins Gervaise in his new scheme. But the sensuality of his nature and the malign influence of two women upon him bring about his ruin. The last rehearsals of *Troilus and Cressida* are ruined by the interference of the "she-devil," Lady Sumner, a ruin completed by her hissing the performance. His passion for the actress, Europa, makes Tristram her slave and a wreck physically and morally, so that the great new play suffers. But he dies in exaltation after being wounded by Groom as he thinks of the world as it will be.

The central figures, Tristram and Lady Sumner, might appear in a realistic play, but Davidson is always a romanticist at heart and he returns to romance before the end of the play. Lady Sumner as the page boy of her early love affair dies in strains of unashamed sentimentality; there is an accumulation of deaths at the end of the play, and, mortally wounded though they are, both Tristram and Gervaise can pour out at length their romantic vision of the universe.

Davidson's last two plays, *The Triumph of Mammon* and *Mammon and his Message* form the first two parts of a trilogy celebrating the career of Davidson's masterful, dynamic, ideal hero. The third part was never published, and probably never written. These plays are essentially romantic works, for although some attempt has been made to tie them down to earth they soar away into space like balloons.

The date of the plays' action is 1907 or any subsequent year, and modern mundane features, such as motor-cars, battleships, automatic fortune-telling machines and socialists appear in the play. But it is impossible to imagine a realistic modern setting for the plays. One reads about these details and is supposed to accept them, but they come upon the mind with a shock of surprise, and do not seem to belong to the setting. Davidson takes us to some imaginary country called Thule, which seems to us to exist in the mind only, and the characters in the play are far removed from ordinary

people. In none of Davidson's plays, with the possible exception of *The Theatrocrat*, is the characterization vivid, but in the Mammon plays there is no real individual characterization at all, for the play is the embodiment of Davidson's ideal, and the different characters represent the conflicting emotions in his own mind under the guise of symbolical characters, and it is this fact that gives the plays their peculiar dream-like atmosphere.

The Triumph of Mammon opens with a talk between Magnus, Prince of Thule, and Guendolen, his betrothed. She tells how she was at her wedding with his brother, when he suddenly renounced Christianity and left her unwed, for which he was banished by his horrified father, King Christian, under the name of Mammon, never to return except as a Christian, penitent. At this point Mammon arrives, unrepentant, in a battleship to claim his bride. He is taken bound, and apparently penitent, before the king, but when he refuses to repent, the verdict of the king's counsellor is that the king shall castrate him to save Guendolen and the throne from his power. To save himself Mammon simulates repentance and, when freed by the king, strikes him dead with his knife. He then finds Guendolen and Magnus on their wedding night, murders Magnus and is accepted joyfully by Guendolen, who is still a virgin. By a show of arms he secures the government of the country, and proclaims his new doctrine of matter.

The castration scene is one of the two remarkable scenes in the play. The struggle between Mammon and Christian is that of Mammon for untrammelled life, the struggle between Davidson's idea of himself and that in his own nature which stood in the way of his fulfilment. The opening of the scene is arresting. Mammon is bound to a pillar facing a Crucifix. He contemplates his own marvellous power and sees himself as "The loftiest and freshest thought of time," the prophet of the new age; and yet he is disturbed by the thought of the "sad Christ" and jealous of all that Christ stands for and has created:

Anthems and creeds in stone and sculptured songs,
 Glorias and masses and colossal fugues—
 Porphyry, alabaster; pillars, aisles
 Crypts, cloisters—mystery, gloom; high windows steeped
 Against the east in living hues . . .
 Millions on millions of the highest hearts,
 The noblest breeds of men, called after Christ!

Bitterly as Davidson hated the creed of Christianity, like D. H. Lawrence, with whose beliefs those of Davidson have certain affinities, he was attracted by the pathos and the appeal of the figure of Christ Himself. The power and the attraction of Christ exist for Davidson, though they must be resisted because they cannot be reconciled with the force and brutality of the New Man. So Guendolen in the first scene tells how she swam after Mammon's ship, aflame with love for him and his new faith, when she met The Son of Man walking upon the waters:

He showed no wounds, He spoke no word, nor sighed,
 But looked and looked, wistfully and with wonder.

She turns back with Him and vows herself to Christ. In *The Theatrocrat* the Bishop recites his prologue denouncing Christ and all gods, but afterwards he says that it is only natural that the people stoned him in their fierce resentment:

And who shall teach
 The orphans that their mothers are not; who
 Unpeople Heaven of lovers, children, saints?
 . . . the little child
 That lived a year and holds its parents' hearts
 In dimpled hands for ever? Christ Himself
 That pardoned wanton women, where is He?

The hero in *The Testament of a Prime Minister* says that with the death of Christ through the death of Christianity, two insane ideas will die—God and Sin. But as he views the sad victim of Calvary he weeps and kisses the wounded feet, although he knows that this is the death of the evils of the universe—God and Sin.

The antagonism of Mammon to Christianity is unchangeable, for its days are past, and only rottenness remains:

That what was life and breath and flower and fruit,
Is mildew now and blight, disease and death,
That Christendom's the matter with the world.

King Christian is the symbol for Mammon, and for Davidson, of the human Father, of Christianity and of God. Christian fortifies his mind by reminding himself that he is like Abraham, ready to sacrifice Isaac, or God ready to sacrifice his Son, Christ. Christian is like the figure of the father in the *Ballad of the Making of a Poet*, for he too says that all is good, since all is predestined. As he says:

God foreordained this Christian surgery:
My will is but a tool in the machine
Whereon God turns the world as on a lathe.

Like the father in the early poem he loves his son, but his sorrow and love for his son is extinguished by the mad ardour of his religion. Inspired by this ardour he preaches the beauty of virginity; in heaven virginity and chastity reign; Christ was a virgin, and finally, "sex is sin, sex is hell." A shuddering desperation overcomes Mammon as he sees his father approach with a knife, but he clings to his faith:

O father, sex is soul,
The flower and fragrance of humanity,
More beautiful than beauty, holier
Than any sacrament, greater than God—
I tell you, father, greater than all the gods,
Being the infinite source of every thought
Worth thinking, every symbol, myth, divine
Delight of fancy.

He speaks his defiance of Christianity, his loathing for virginity as a creed of perfection and calls up his vision of the universe:

The Universe unveiled is there, there, there!
. . . were I unloosed
I should upheave this vault and batter down
The buttress of the church that hides high Heaven—
Heaven and the heavens, showing you far and wide
The immaculate, material Universe,
All radiance, darkness, beauty, glory, power.

Even when Mammon seizes his father and stabs him in the throat the conflict within him is not over, for he cries in terror:

Heart of Hell, what awful eyes!
I would you were the soul of Christendom!
I would you had been God!

The death of Christian is necessary for Mammon if he is to seize on the central store of life, just as the destruction of the authority of Christianity is for Davidson. The castration scene is Davidson's symbolic picture of his breaking down all the obstacles which prevented his self-fulfilment. But Mammon is not fully powerful until he has seized his loved object; when this is done fullest self-expression and the beginning of power can come. He is in fact like the man in the fairy tale wrestling with the dragon in the lake; twice he wrestles saying that if only he could have an embrace from the princess he could throw the dragon sky-high; the third time the princess comes and her embrace gives renewed strength which makes him able to hurl the dragon to the sky.

In the first scene Mammon has shown his magnetic power over Guendolen. She has promised to marry his brother for the sake of Christ, but when Mammon lands unexpectedly she calls out:

Magnus, look! oh look!
What kind of man is this? He comes from Hell,
More wonderful than man he seems! From Heaven?
Beautiful, terrible!

Terrified of his effect over her, she appeals to Christian to allow an immediate marriage with Magnus.

The second important scene in the play, both for its writing and for the career of Mammon, is the marriage night of Guendolen. Guendolen is talking with Magnus and is outraged at the idea of sexual union. Magnus explains the necessity of it in the grossest terms, but Guendolen stills him:

Oh shame! Oh shame! Hush! Hush! And listen!—Hush!
The murmur of the seaboard surges beat
Their slow uncertain, softly-swelling fugue,—
The brooding surges, fingering the shore.

She refuses to believe that she was conceived as beasts are, and says that she thought it came about by the union of souls and that in the hope of conceiving a new Christ she had married Magnus. Sexual union, in her creed, destroys the soul of man and makes him like the beasts. Magnus himself is only a figure head—one of an inferior breed of men not for Mammon's bride—but the dramatic tension of the scene comes when he asks if she has never felt "the fire of Hell that burns in sinful bodies." She says that she has had this feeling for Mammon twice, once when she swam near to his ship and met Christ upon the waters, and again when he stood before the throne in sackcloth. She felt it then:

In every pulse
In every nerve a fount arose, a fire
Began: my body like a furnace burned
To melt him up and hoard him in my womb,
A molten treasure.

Bitter anguish falls upon Magnus as he realizes that his brother already has such love from Guendolen as he would give up heaven to win. The great Mammon comes, fresh from the murder of his father, bursts open the door, seizes Magnus and throws him upon the swords of the Guards outside. Mammon intends to kill Guendolen too, since he cannot take that which has belonged to his brother, until Guendolen tells him that she is still a virgin. She tells him her conception of sexual love, but he receives it gently:

That mystic fancy blossomed in your blood,
Which was my faith in boyhood; haughty minds
And virginal put forth such flowers at first,

Guendolen's feeling about sexual union is bound up with her belief in God and the nature of the soul, but when Mammon shows her that "To be a beast—it is to be a star!" and that God does not exist, she loses these conceptions. God, Christianity, sin, the soul, the sinfulness of sexual union, all these misconceptions disappear at once:

These crystal windows of the Universe,
From spirit, myth and immaterial dream
I bid all things be free; and at my word—

Watch, Guendolen!—like leprosy, the soul
 With all its noisome blotches, ulcers, blains
 Of evil conscience, penances, remorse,
 Contrition, sloughs and crumbles into nought,
 Leaving the proud sweet body, clean and pure,
 The wholesome earth, the sun, the Universe,
 Infinite loveliness, ethereal power.

Gone is the maiming, terrible sense of guilt which has afflicted countless generations of men, dispelled not through "The blood of the Lamb," "The Cross of Christ," but by the dismissal of all the old conceptions of life and the acceptance of a new universe. In this play it breaks upon us with a turbulent force and swing which brings the new universe before our eyes and upon us, but in actual life not by saying "Yea, Yea" and "Nay, Nay" can a man cut himself free from the beliefs and the feelings grown into his roots, and accept gladly and entirely a new and triumphant creed and assertion of life; and this Davidson himself found to his cost. Mammon is, once again, the aspiring dynamic part of Davidson, triumphant in the fantasy incarnated in his plays. Guendolen's virginal mind is shattered and enlarged not by argument so much as by the imaginative picture which Mammon draws of the whole universe moving as with one pulse of love:

O love, we do as orbs that couple do,
 By chance conjoined beneath eternal night. . . .
 They smite against each other setting fire
 To every vapour, metal, earth whereof
 They are compounded; and their bodies fuse
 Together into one ecstatic thought,
 A new light in the firmament to be,
 A flower of glory and a well of stars.

Davidson in his writing has a sense of cosmic movement, the power of creating vast spaces, whirling orbs, teeming life, joyous and triumphant. In his *Testament of John Davidson* and his latest poems he was inclined to load his lines too heavily with scientific terms and manufactured Latin words, but in the Mammon plays his conception is still one he can

deal with in language and rhythm which has a splendid sweep of its own. So Mammon describes to Guendolen the whole living world at night rejoicing in love:

With every heart-beat, every pulse of time
Myriads of coupled orbs together melt,
Evolving light where pristine darkness reigned.

Flowers, trees, beasts, birds and things invisible
Fishes and grasses, mosses, worms and men,
Endure the passion and enjoy the lust
Of ripened seed that cannot but be sown,
Of love, of life that swells and buds and breaks,
And will be love and life and sex and sin,
Adorable, lascivious, sacrosanct,
For ever and for ever and for ever.

Guendolen and Mammon are to be the first pair of people to be self-consciously what every pair of animals are in the universe—marvellous matter—and as such their children are to be after them Christ and Anti-Christ, and with the cry that:

I know it now, I feel it in my heart—
The Universe is love, is ecstasy,

Guendolen gives herself up to Mammon.

The struggle is over, Mammon has killed Father and God and has expressed himself in his love; the question now remains what is left for him to do? Davidson in this play wants to show him supreme as king, but the action which takes place reflects less directly the struggle in Davidson's mind than did the earlier part; it is no longer a symbolic rendering of the dream world within his own mind. Hence the ending of the play is of minor interest and merely relates in disconnected scenes the attitude of the various parties, Socialist, Nietzschean, Neo-pagan, etc., to his new rule, his placing of the body of the murdered on a platform in the hall and his final forcing of his rule upon the people by the use of guns.

The play as a whole is more imperfect in construction than any of Davidson's earlier plays, and this is probably because

the earlier scenes, especially those of the castration and wedding night, have a real and piercing intensity for Davidson because he feels that they are his unconscious experiences come to life in an ever-satisfying symbol.

These are the scenes which "came into being with a profound satisfaction beyond delight, beyond ecstasy." Thus when he has created these scenes and comes to speak of Socialists, Mayors, and Mammon's practical policy he passes from the deepest levels of the mind to the more superficial, and the writing seems inconclusive and haphazard in arrangement.

The second part of the Mammon trilogy, *Mammon and his Message*, has as its subject Mammon's attitude to the problem of government and the development of his code of life. As literature it is much weaker than the first part, since the vital part of Mammon's struggle, for Davidson—the killing of his father and the capture of his bride—is over. The second play of Mammon presents the problem to Davidson of how he is going to show forth the policy of "action" in the person of his hero. Davidson's theory of what should be the ruler's action in the state is derived partly from Nietzsche, partly from his own feelings. Some people have maintained that Davidson owes everything to Nietzsche, others that he had practically no acquaintance with his work, but the truth lies between the two. There are frequent references to Nietzsche in Davidson's works, more especially in the Mammon plays and in *A Rosary* although it is probable that he had no very profound or extensive knowledge of the works. He does not accept the idea of Nietzsche's Overman, as he tells us, because although this idea is natural to an inferior race such as the Poles: "such an idea could never occur to an Englishman. The Englishman is the Overman and the history of England is the history of his evolution." In *Mammon and his Message* a deputation comes to Mammon from the followers of Nietzsche, and Mammon's reply to it is that Nietzsche led backwards, not forwards, and that his Overman is really only another Christ in disguise. Mammon says that he wants the world to be much more the world:

"Men to be men, and women, women—all adventure, courage, instinct, passion, power." In spite of the superior tone which Davidson adopts to Nietzsche there are certain ideas that he takes from his works, and from those of his followers. Nietzsche objected to Christianity because he thought that it brought with it democracy and socialism, for Christianity preaches the equal worth of all men, and Socialism is the theory of the state which is based on this assumption. He objected also to kindness and care for the worthless and inefficient in the state, which he says shows "the inability of a state to excrete." Mammon, in *The Triumph of Mammon* interviews the socialist leaders, but he will have nothing to do with socialism. They appeal for the mitigation of the lot of the lowest class in society, but Mammon speaks of it in the same terms as did Nietzsche: "I take the failures for the excrement, the defecation of the commonwealth," and he goes on to say that they are gathered into the hospital, asylum, poorhouse, jails, which are the "sewers and cesspools of the social world." As for "Isocracy," the rule of all for all—it is impossible while men such as Cæsar, Napoleon and himself are born into the world. It is clear that the reason why he does not believe in the Superman of the future is that he believes that he himself is he. There is some difficulty in combining the belief he expresses in both Mammon plays that all men are great, since all are composed of the same matter, with his belief in his own pre-eminence. In *Mammon and his Message* he says:

I'll carve the world
In my own image, I, the first of men
To comprehend the greatness of mankind;
I'll melt the earth and cast it in my mould,
The form and beauty of the universe.

The only logical solution of the two ideas is that others are potentially great, while he is actually so, because he alone is self-conscious, but in actual fact he behaves as if he thought very little of the rest of humanity.

Mammon's feeling of disgust for the "refuse" of the state is much emphasized. He summons all the beggars

and the criminals to his presence and tells them that he intends to exterminate them, first giving them the pleasure of a wonderful feast. The cause of Davidson's attitude as expressed by Mammon is not due to Nietzsche's doctrines alone, or chiefly, but to his fear of old age and disease. This fear exists in most people, but it took the form of an acute horror in Davidson. In his preface to *Fleet Street*, written before his suicide, he clearly feels that he now must seek death. "The time has come to make an end," he begins and then calmly states his reasons—poverty, the uncongenial literary work to which the need for money drove him, illness. The root of Davidson's attitude to old age and death lies in his identification of sexual power with life, an identification which is incomplete in most people's minds, but which Davidson felt to be absolute. Therefore Mammon will have no poor, incurables, criminals, insane, or people whose sexual life is over, in his state:

Man is my prisoner, guilty
Before the Universe of growing old. . . .
Only youth should be,
Should have, should do, should rule.

It is the motive of the New Generation knocking at the door carried to its logical conclusion. The dominant principle of the universe for Davidson is the begetting and conceiving of matter, and this is the cause of his tremendous emphasis on youth.

Mammon summons also the prostitutes. They are told that they are the corner stone of Christianity, but that now Christianity has been destroyed, they must cease to exist. The wrong that they have done is only incidentally that they have given themselves for money, and chiefly that they have refused to create life:

Your cruellest pain is when you think of all
The honied treasure of your bodies spent
And no new life to show.

He gives to them a picture of the pale sad faces of their unborn children looking in through shut windows, which

arouses their easy tears. They are commanded to leave the kingdom with a sum of money or else to marry:

You must be natural and chaste; like beasts
Unconsciously, devoutly bent on offspring.

Mammon's reception by the beggars and prostitutes is unfavourable, for the beggars curse, the prostitutes laugh, and in disgust Mammon decides that war, not propaganda, must be the decisive force.

The greater part of the play is a demonstration of the personality of Mammon. In spite of his triumphant victory over the Father and God, his glorying assertion of the non-existence of sin, Mammon is not conscience-free. There are scenes in *Mammon and his Message* where Mammon, like the remorseless hero-villain in the Elizabethan plays of Marston, is filled with horror at the sight of his murdered victims which his tortured mind conjures up before him. Oswald, his confidant, is with him when he tears down the curtains to cover them from his sight, and he calls upon him to repent and suggests that they should confess their crime and die in peace. Oswald, a young man without personality, is really a part of Mammon, his conscience (the sense of guilt which still lurked within Mammon, as it did within Davidson). Mammon and Oswald are the two sides of the same nature, and the dramatic conflict is within Mammon, and not outside him. Mammon is above the moral laws and he rejects Oswald's proposal, saying that the sense of guilt only comes from the unexpectedness of the idea of crime; once the idea of crime is familiar and action is taken, the guilt goes:

But when the naked deed has reached
Its orbit, and begun to circle, free
In the all-containing ether, our realm in space
Is richer, greater by the new-born star,
Our rank and system in the universe
Of stabler equipoise!

In an earlier scene Oswald confesses that, harrowed by remorse, he cannot sleep. Mammon recommends marriage to Oswald. He says that the universe renews itself in three ways,

by defecation, once considered shameful but now by him exalted, by death, and by sex:

Unlock the floodgate of the Universe
That thunders for deliverance form and power
In all the sex of plants and beasts and men.

He commands Oswald to marry his betrothed, Inga. However, the beautiful and splendid Inga, attracted by Mammon's reputation, comes to see him; when he sees her he realizes that she is only for a prince among men, and says that he himself will be her lover and the father of her child. As he says: "My message is a deed, always a deed," and to him the universe seems to remain unsatisfied until the beautiful Inga ceases to remain a barren virgin.

From her arms he goes to enlarge his experience by torturing in mediæval fashion Gottlieb, the old counsellor who had suggested Mammon's castration to his father. Mammon must destroy with the cruelty of supreme power the last representative of the Father authority. Oswald protests, sick with horror, and after conducting the torture, he becomes insane. Inga, true bride for her sadistic lover, rejoices:

An hour ago! He left my arms straightway
To rack a man! How great!

Mammon's sadistic act is done in order to exert his power and also that he may enjoy the fullest experience of life; as he says:

Nothing is needless—nothing men can do.
I mean to tap the reservoir of pain.

Many times in his writing does Davidson tap this reservoir, sometimes with appalling effect. *The Schoolboy's Tragedy*, one of his short stories, is nothing but a lengthy description of the tortures inflicted upon a schoolboy by a sadistic schoolmaster. The experimenter in *The Vivisector's Testament* tortures a horse, not for scientific purposes, but with joy; and the innocent wife in the poem, *The Ordeal*, dies in agony through being forced upon a red-hot ploughshare to test her innocence. In the episode of the torture of

Gottlieb, Davidson triumphantly asserts the dominance of the hero-man over the feeling of guilt, the supreme rightness of the exercise of power in the infliction of agony.

After the torture scene Mammon turns his energies to the state once more. Money is necessary and Davidson, like Gissing, through bitter experience, believes that money is essential to living in any full sense. As Mammon says, man cannot eat or drink, or live or love without it. His first action, when there is a revolt against him for his torture of Gottlieb and for the burning of the abbey, is to seize the bank. Back he comes again to the chief glory of the supporters of "Action"—war, destruction's ministers, death's freeman,

lust's exponents, the 'blood-red dawn',

Mammon's cannons win, and he is left at the end of the play still praising his universe of matter and his own greatness. The third part of the trilogy, probably never written, was to show not only that Mammon could transcend every evil he could do, but also every evil that could be done to him.

So ends, somewhat inconclusively, Davidson's play with its message of revolt against a mechanized world, its assertion of the value of the instincts of man rather than of the intellect. Like D. H. Lawrence, Davidson starts with a revolt against the Father. In *The Ballad of the Making of a Poet* and in *The Triumph of Mammon* itself, the father is shown as a good and loving, but insanely bigoted figure; but in spite of his worth in both poem and play the father must die. There is, however, one poem by Davidson, the ballad of *A Woman and her Son*, which gives the reverse view of the father, as a small, bigoted and tyrannical being, shutting out the light of day from the young. In this powerful and macabre poem the woman lies dying, longing for her son to come. When he comes, instead of comforting her, he urges her to be strong and face the truth that there is no God and no future life. He reminds her of the fifty wretched years that she has spent in her marriage and widowhood. She was left penniless by

her husband, a crude evangelist, whose soul was like a wafer that could only take one impress.

The time is now come for all sons to face all fathers!
The child must take the father by the beard
And say, 'What did you in begetting me?'

The son describes the wretchedness of his home, where the house was hell, filled with unwell, half-starved children, clad in cast-offs, where there was no room, no joy:

Nothing but fear
Of our evangelist, whose little purse
Opened to all save us; who squandered smiles
On wily proselytes, and gloomed at home.

For Davidson, as for D. H. Lawrence, the way of escape from the Father is to destroy existing ways of thought and accepted conceptions of morality. Davidson has to destroy Christianity; Lawrence, conventional sexual morality; and both wish to give new value to instinctive life and to destroy the tyranny of the intellect. Both find that the most satisfactory way of attempting to destroy the effect upon themselves of the hardship and repression of their youth is to project into fantasy and into literature a figure of themselves as the all-potent, powerful male.

In the imaginative work of both is embodied a vision of life in which sexual love is the centre of existence. But whereas Lawrence confines us in a beautiful but suffocating tunnel, Davidson bursts open the walls of the round world of our childhood, so that we can lean out and see the stars beyond, the "matter" of his praising.

CHAPTER VIII

THOMAS HARDY—THE DYNASTS

THOMAS HARDY shared Davidson's feeling, becoming common in the 'nineties, that something is wrong with human existence as it appears in modern civilization. Davidson believed that the world could be put right by a powerfully dynamic individual fulfilling himself and so reconstructing society, and he had always an unbounded joy in the idea of the creation of new life. Hardy's pessimism was fundamental and involved distrust of the foundations on which life itself is built, the creative and reproductive instinct. Hardy settled upon his beliefs, not primarily because he was more intellectual than Davidson and therefore attacked the problem of life at its source, but because he was constitutionally a melancholic. In his *Life*, written by his wife, Florence Emily Hardy, we are told of an incident in his childhood in which Hardy as a small boy lies in the sun with a straw hat over his eyes, thinking that he did not want to grow up into a man as other boys did, meditating that his life was useless and not worth completing. He spoke of these reflections to his mother, and was surprised that she, who nearly lost her life at his birth, was grieved to learn that he felt like this. He himself must have been like "Old Father Time," Arabella's son in *Jude the Obscure*, who killed himself and Jude's other children, because he saw no value in life and felt that they were merely burdens to his parents. The great friendship between Hardy and Barrie is also significant, for Barrie himself is at heart profoundly pessimistic about life, shivering in the cold world and longing, in such plays as *Mary Rose* and *Peter Pan*, for a return to the safety of the pre-birth existence.

The view of the universe that we find in Hardy's novels

is, then, not primarily due to his intellectual scheme. His melancholic meditative temperament turned his attention to the basic problem of the universe, that of suffering, and his emotion of sympathy was aroused by what seemed to him the meaningless tragedy of the lives around him. He had an acute perception of the sorrow of life, and desired to share the world-sorrow and to penetrate to its roots. The idea that Hardy expresses in the creation of such people as Tess, Michael Henchard, and above all in Sue, is that humanity has evolved a species, high in its ranks, which is too sensitive to bear with the rude shocks of life. The power at the back of the universe is not consciously malign, but blindly works out its unconscious purpose, torturing luckless humanity, unknowing and uncaring that it is. In his notes, published in his *Life*, he says that man was created "So far beyond all apparent first intention (on the emotional side). . . . The emotions have no place in a world of defect, and it is a cruel injustice that they should have developed in it. If Law itself had consciousness, how the aspect of its creatures would terrify it, fill it with remorse."

With this acute sensitivity to suffering in Hardy goes a hostility for religion which is different from that of Davidson. The difference arises partly from the fact that Davidson was brought up as a believer in a very strict form of Scotch Presbyterianism, Hardy in the more gentle leisured atmosphere of the southern Church of England. To Davidson, therefore, Christianity was a fierce gigantic power which must be destroyed; to Hardy it was a worn-out creed, incompatible with modern theories and with the facts of existence. Sometimes, however, as in *Jude the Obscure*, Hardy displays a bitter resentment against Christianity, for its insistence on formal rules of conduct, which he believed to crucify the flesh and torture the minds of the sensitive, already torn by life itself.

The inter-action of the blind destructive power of the will behind the universe with the wilfulness, the cruelty, the sensitiveness of human beings creates the rhythm of Hardy's novels; it creates the brooding grandeur of Egdon Heath,

the subtlety of Sue and her response to life. But frequently general principles overweigh Hardy's novels, and the events do not appear inevitable but deliberately introduced by him to show the cruelty of life. The collection of violent deaths, for instance, at the end of *The Return of the Native* is artificial, if not ludicrous. Also the introduction by Hardy of comments on life and its cruelties is harmful to the balance of his novels, and more disturbing still are the symbolic, ironic comments—the crying of the rabbit in the trap at the moment when both Sue and Jude are meditating on the cruelties of the marriage institution, the chanting of the psalm: "Truly God is loving unto Israel," while Sue surveys her murdered children.

Jude the Obscure, the last of the great novels, was published in 1895, *The Dynasts* from 1904–8, and there is a considerable change in Hardy's attitude towards the problem during that time. His attitude has by this time become more intellectual; he is consciously seeking a solution for the whole of human life, past, present and future. The vast expanse of human life is spread out before him and he sees the world as a being would who was far above it; Europe is stretched out flat before him, and men are but tiny objects controlled by the great Unconscious Will. Hardy's passionate sympathy for mankind makes some of his novels give the impression that he felt fate to be consciously malign, and makes us feel that he is twisting his æsthetic material, so that it may prove his thesis rather than possess its own full life.

In *The Dynasts* we are never allowed to forget that the power behind the universe is automatic and unfeeling, and that it uses human life for its own hidden and unconscious purposes. The feeling of revolt against fate and against orthodox views and institutions, found in his mind at times, is gone, and instead there is a calm acceptance of what life involves. The cause of this change lies not only in Hardy's increased years, but also in the growth of the feeling of agnosticism in the early twentieth century. It is difficult now to realize the shock that the subject matter of *Tess* and *Jude*

the Obscure caused to educated readers when they first appeared, although what outraged most people was the attack on conventional sexual morality and not the more subtle point—that the pessimism implicit in *Jude the Obscure* attacks the very basis of existence. Ten years is however, a considerable time in which new ideas, or rather ideas recurrent at certain epochs in the world's history, have time to be accepted as part of their intellectual equipment by the educated. By the end of the first decade in the twentieth century not only was a modern mechanized civilization and organized religion suspect, but also the minds of educated people were ready to accept a drama in which the universe was conceived of as being controlled by no conscious purpose whatever, in which universe suffering was only arbitrary and meaningless. As Hardy himself said, the philosophy of *The Dynasts* is only "a generalized form of what the thinking world had gradually come to adopt, myself included."

There is a change also in technique, a change resulting from his passing from the form of the novel to that of the epic drama. His comment is no longer a personal contribution, something alien to the independent existence of the novel he is creating: it is woven into the structure of the drama, and without it *The Dynasts* could not stand as a work of art. For Hardy brought back to drama the chorus as well as the soliloquy, two of the most valuable parts of the technique of the poetic dramatist. Attempts have been made to write poetic drama without the help of either, but the writers of cosmic drama realize that they cannot limit themselves by the conventions of realistic writing. It is the chorus, the Ancient Spirit of the Years, the Spirits of the Pities and the Spirits Ironic and Sinister, who show us the vast expanse of life which is the subject of *The Dynasts*. We see the events of the Napoleonic wars from before Trafalgar to after Waterloo. The wars are seen from the standpoint of an Englishman and the real antagonists are therefore England and France, but the scene embraces the chief countries in Europe, and the struggle is taken as typical of the history of mankind. It typifies the eternal disharmony of human life, the desires and

aspirations of man in conflict with the force of fate, the suffering of masses of men for the caprice of ambitious men of talent.

The play opens with a discussion by the spirits in the Overworld about the nature of the universe. The spirit of the Years speaks of the principle of the Universe:

Like a knitter drowsed,
Whose fingers play in skilled unmindfulness,
The Will has woven with an absent heed
Since life first was; and ever will so weave.

We are shown a vision of Europe as it seems to the spectator far removed: "The nether sky opens, and Europe is disclosed as a prone and emaciated figure, the Alps shaping like a backbone, and the branching mountain-chains like ribs, the peninsular plateau of Spain forming a head. . . . The point of view then sinks downwards through space, and draws near to the surface of the perturbed countries, where the peoples, distressed by events which they did not cause, are seen writhing, crawling, heaving, and vibrating in their various cities and nationalities."

Although the view of the spirit of the universe as a blind unfeeling force is the dominant one in *The Dynasts*, the Spirits of the Pities and the Ironic Spirits express conflicting views. It is because of this divergence that the chorus in *The Dynasts* is emotionally and intellectually satisfying, in a way that the comment in the novels is not. The Ironic Spirits and the Spirits of the Pities express the revolt in the human mind against the impersonality of fate. The Ironic Spirits represent the part of our own minds which shows its hatred of the idea of this impersonality by pointing out the apparent malignity of fate, and the fact that the lives of some unfortunate people seem to have been arranged by a sardonic mind. The Spirits of the Pities represent the feeling of sympathy for the suffering of men and the emotional longing for some solution of life which will give this suffering a meaning. In the play the Pities at times identify themselves with the sufferers in the war and give voice to a dirge, as in the

scene at Walcheren. At the end of *The Dynasts* it is the Pities who speak last, proclaiming their hope:

Nay;—shall not Its blindness break?
Yea, must not Its heart awake,
Promptly tending
To Its mending
In a genial germinating purpose, and for loving-kindness' sake?

But—a stirring thrills the air
Like to sounds of joyance there
That the rages
Of the ages
Shall be cancelled, and deliverance offered from the darts that were,
Consciousness the Will informing, till It fashion all things fair.

But the whole argument of *The Dynasts* is that of the Spirit of the Years, and the Pities speak last to represent the unconquerable irrational hope of men's minds, and also to lift the closing scenes of *The Dynasts* to a more lyrical plane.

The chorus is used by Hardy as a masterly device for giving unity to his material, and the material he uses is enormous and varied. There is a multiplicity of scenes including a whole range of military and naval operations, political scenes in various countries, episodes in Napoleon's life, and scenes in the lives of ordinary people. In taking a scheme of this kind the easiest way of giving an appearance of unity would be to place in high relief heroic figures, and it is by such means that the epics of the past have achieved their unity. This method, however, is not possible in *The Dynasts* since the main theme is the waste of human life, and the smallness of stature of the leaders and wreckers of a nation's life. Napoleon, therefore, is not shown as a hero or as a villain, but as a clever schemer, a brilliant general and organizer. We are prevented from admiring him as a hero, for he is shown deserting his soldiers lightly and without remorse, but we cannot regard him with animosity, for he is pleasing in his personal relationships. He himself vacillates between regarding himself as a great power, comparable with Alex-

ander the Great, and as the tool of some hidden force, which uses him and then casts him aside. The character-sketching of the other people in the play is even slighter. Josephine and Marie Louise achieve some importance because of their relationship with Napoleon, but such people as the Prince Regent, Caroline, Pitt, Nelson, are merely figures that we see with detachment from outside. Hardy's way of writing, even in his novels, is not that of identifying himself with his characters; he is the subtle observer who sits beside people, observing their emotion. But in *The Dynasts* he is deliberately avoiding giving prominence to any individual, for the interest of the play is to be in the grand sweep of events.

The real greatness of *The Dynasts* lies in Hardy's power in marshalling events, and in making us see these events as supremely important, since they are the inevitable result of the unseen working of the power of fate. Hardy does fail to arouse our interest in some of the scenes in the 525 pages of *The Dynasts*, but this happens chiefly in scenes of conversation, or of political speeches. Battle scenes, which most writers would find presenting extraordinary difficulties, Hardy turns into episodes of absorbing interest. This is because we do not see the battle as an isolated incident; from our positions as spectators, far above struggling humanity, we see the ebb and flow of fortune, the ambition of men, the suffering fatality of their lives. We hear the generals consult about the conduct of the war, the soldiers talking about the moments of pain or joy.

The tragedy of the retreat from Russia and of the battles involved, for example, is expressed by a combination of descriptions in prose with verse narrative and lyrical comment by the spirits.

Spirit of the Pities.

An object like a dun-piled caterpillar,
Shuffling its length in painful heaves along,
Hitherward. . . . Yea, what is this Thing we see
Which, moving as a single monster might,
Is yet not one but many?

Spirit of the Years.

Even the Army

Which once was called the Grand; now in retreat
 From Moscow's muteness, urged by That within it;
 Together with its train of followers—
 Men, matrons, babes, in brabbling multitudes.

The Recording Angel continues with the narration, and then prose description follows:

"What has floated down from the sky upon the Army is a flake of snow. Then come another and another, till natural features, hitherto varied with the tints of autumn, are confounded, and all is phantasmal grey and white. The caterpillar shape still creeps laboriously nearer, but instead of increasing in size by the rules of perspective it gets more attenuated, and there are left upon the ground behind it minute parts of itself, which are speedily flaked over, and remain as white pimples by the wayside. . . . Pines rise mournfully on each side of the nearing object; ravens in flocks advance with it overhead, waiting to pick out the eyes of strays who fall. The snowstorm increases, descending in tufts which can hardly be shaken off. The sky seems to join itself to the land. The marching figures drop rapidly, and almost immediately become white grave mounds. Endowed with enlarged powers of audition as of vision, we are struck by the mournful taciturnity that prevails. Nature is mute. Save for the incessant flogging of the windbroken and lacerated horses there are no sounds." The retreating French try to cross the Beresina river, but the bridges give way and they are attacked by the enemy, and as the rearguard arrive on the remaining bridge it is set on fire. Those who are upon it, burn or drown; those who are on the further side have lost their last chance, and perish in attempting to wade the stream, or at the hands of the Russians.

Semichorus 1 of the Pties (aerial music).

What will be seen in the morning light?

What will be learnt when the spring breaks bright,

And the frost unlocks to the sun's soft sight?

Semichorus 2.

Death in a thousand motley forms;
Charred corpses hooking each other's arms
In the sleep that defies all war's alarms!

Chorus.

Pale cysts of souls in every stage,
Still bent to embraces of love or rage—
Souls passed to where History pens no page.
The flames of the burning bridge go out as it consumes to the waters
edge, and darkness mantles all, nothing continuing but the purl
of the river and the clickings of floating ice.

The Dynasts was performed in an abridged form by Granville Barker at the Kingsway in November 1913, but it is difficult to see how it could be satisfactorily performed on the stage, since the most valuable part of the play is, perhaps, the prose description. Given a producer of genius, *The Dynasts* might conceivably find its proper expression in the form of a talkie, for the cinema is more fitted to represent the vast battle scenes, the aerial view of Europe and of humanity than any form of stage representation.

The supernatural part of *The Dynasts* is of supreme importance, since it makes the play a unity; history and humanity are at one. But the danger of being withdrawn to a height above the conflict is that humanity may lose its reality for us. Hardy, however, is not writing as one coldly detached. *The Dynasts* is a national drama, for Hardy is looking at the struggle with Napoleon from the English point of view.

The arch enemy for Napoleon is England, and England's preoccupation with the figure of Napoleon is shown. In his novels Hardy shows himself as an intensely national writer, and in his preface to *The Dynasts* Hardy says that it was the part that England played in the Napoleonic struggle that awoke his interest in the epoch about which he writes. So we have a variety of English scenes—the meetings of Parliament, the anxiety and death of Pitt, the madness of King George, the parties of the Prince Regent, the famous dance

before Waterloo, which bring the life of England before our vision. More valuable still are the scenes of ordinary English life in the country, or the conversations of countrymen away at the wars. The lighting of the beacons on the heath at midnight awakes in one's mind a vision of Egdon Heath. The naïve disappointment of the countryman who has lost a day's pay to see Napoleon burnt, only to find it is but his effigy, brings a vivid realization of the position of bogey that Napoleon had in simple people's minds. The conversation of the English deserters in the Peninsular War makes one see the war, not as an heroic contest taking place in a romance, but as a piece of ordinary human life. The English deserters sigh "Would that I were at home in England again, where there's old-fashioned tippie, and a proper God A'mighty instead of this eternal 'Ooman and baby"; the Goya-like horror of the war lifts, and we see human beings pursuing their own life. For in spite of the harshness of destiny and the ruin which war brings, his own individual life remains important to the ordinary man. He is concerned with his desire to see "the winter sun slanting friendly over Baldwin Street as 'a used to do!"; he is concerned with the enjoyment of the women and the wine that come his way. Life goes on, richly and grossly, in the face of slaughter and of pessimistic philosophers. Hardy realizes this at all times, and it is because of this that he can create life and give the impression that life is justified by its abundance in spite of the sadness of its destiny.

The Dynasts is an extraordinary architectural achievement; starting from a historical foundation Hardy builds up a great universe, which comprehends every phase in human life. But there is a vital weakness in the play, which prevents us from believing completely in the universe Hardy has created for us. This weakness is the diction of the verse part of the play. The opening of the play is typical in its expression:

Shade of the Earth.

What of the Immanent Will and Its designs?

Spirit of the Years.

It works unconsciously, as heretofore,
Eternal artistries in Circumstance,
Whose patterns, wrought by rapt æsthetic rote,
Seem in themselves Its single listless aim,
And not their consequence.

Chorus of the Pities (aerial music).

Still thus? Still thus?
Ever unconscious!
An automatic sense
Unweeting why or whence?
Be, then, the inevitable, as of old,
Although that *so* it be we dare not hold!

Spirit of the Years.

Hold what ye list, fond unbelieving Sprites,
You cannot swerve the pulsion of the Byss,
Which thinking on, yet weighing not Its thought,
Unchecks Its Clock-like laws.

Hardy's words are dead lifeless things; he toils and strives to give life to them, but they remain fragments of the philosophic mind, not living entities. And the strife which was at their birth is heard in their dissonance one with another. Occasionally in the laments of the Pities they achieve a melancholy cadence, but it is rarely that this happens, and at the end of the play, struggle as they may, the Pities cannot soar upwards in their song. Why is it then that *The Dynasts* is described as a great work and does indeed give an impression of majesty? It is I think partly due to the greatness of Hardy's cosmic vision, partly due to the keenness of his visual imagination. And although there are dreary patches of prose in *The Dynasts*, the prose at times attains to greatness, and this gives wings to our imagination so that in our minds we unconsciously give qualities to the verse scenes, which in reality they do not possess.

CHAPTER IX

ARTHUR SYMONS

ARTHUR SYMONS, in our times, seems to be an aloof figure, survivor of the bygone age of the 'nineties, separated by his history and by his temperament from most of the writers of the day, and only reminding us that he still belongs to our time by the occasional publication of an essay on travel or art as faultlessly written as are his earlier prose writings.

His plays were not published until 1916 and 1917, but he is best known for the poems he published from 1889 to 1900 and for his famous prose work, *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* of 1899. Symons was widely known amongst the intellectuals of the 'nineties, and his poems shocked and surprised people, both in their audacious subject matter and in its individual treatment. In Rothenstein's life of himself he speaks of Symons's friendship with Beardsley and Condor, of the fact that he was one of the best known amongst the artists and men of letters at the famous music-halls of the time, and that his life-long æsthetic interest in dancing was also accompanied by what Rothenstein and his friends regarded as an amusing pride in his personal acquaintanceship with the individual dancers. Symons's first volume of poems, *Days and Nights*, was very much in the literary fashion of the day and very commonplace. It contains a number of semi-colloquial poems in a modified ballad style, and the general tone of the poems is distinctly evangelical. Symons was brought up as a Nonconformist, and naturally reacted violently against the atmosphere of the parental home as a writer in the 'nineties, but certainly at this stage there are traces of his upbringing in his literary style. It was, however, rather a fashionable poetic style at the

moment, for even in Davidson's volumes of poetry we find individual poems, which fundamentally, like Symons's early poems, remind one forcibly of the religious tracts, *Christy's Old Organ* and *Jessica's First Prayer*, written in the same half of the century. So in Symons's *Café-singer*, the mother has to leave her dying daughter in order to go to her work at the café, but she returns in time to see her daughter die with the words on her lips that "God will understand." In the poem *Of Charity* a beggar dies and God asks him why the pious did not look after him. The beggar replies that they were too busy looking after souls to care for beggars, and God says that Christ died in vain for them. *An Interruption in Court* describes the meeting between a prostitute and her old father in a court of laws. Recognition takes place and the father faints with grief. The same impulse causes the creation of this type of poem as causes the kind of picture represented by Fildes's *Doctor's Verdict*—the desire to turn a picturesque incident, already full of pre-conceived associations, into use. It is a curious fact that these poems of Symons should be dedicated to Walter Pater "in all gratitude and admiration," while the verse prologue says that the poet must seek Art "where cities pour their turbid human stream through street and mart."

In 1892 Symons published *Silhouettes*, a book of poems of quite a different kind, and showing more individual distinction. In the Preface, added in a second edition, Symons replies to reviewers and objects to compromises and to the shocked retreats of the Puritan conscience. He also makes the famous statement which aroused so much controversy and abuse that "There is no necessary difference in artistic value between a good poem about a flower in the hedge and a good poem about the scent in a sachet." He says that he prefers the town to the country and that it is necessary to find the décor which is the town equivalent of the great natural décor of field and hills. Symons has in this volume a few poems about the beauty of the town itself, of the Embankment and "the pavement glittering with fallen rain," but most of the poems in this volume, as in the next one, *London Nights*, have

as their subject the charm of the chance mistress and prostitute type of women, "the charm of rouge on fragile cheeks." *London Nights*, 1895, was dedicated to Paul Verlaine, and like the earlier volume has a defensive preface. Symons speaks of the abuse of him by people confusing morality with art, and compares the changing standards of morality with the "sure and constant leading of art, which tells me that whatever I find in humanity (passion, desire, the spirit or the senses, the hell or heaven of man's heart) is part of the divine substance which nature weaves in the rough for art to combine cunningly into beautiful patterns." Symons is clearly on a perfectly sound basis here, for nothing dates so quickly as criticism based on moral standards. His subject he says is the moods of men, and he claims the right to record in verse any mood of his, although the mood has been no more than a ripple on the sea. The weakness in many of Symons's poems is that the mood he records is not a complete æsthetic entity.

Symons, himself, probably felt that there was something unsatisfactory about the never ending procession of his chance love encounters as a topic for poetry. He wrote a sonnet, *Nerves*, in which he says that the root of his kind of love lies in his nerves and that he longs for the health of simple minds, so that he shall not hear at midnight:

The clock for ever ticking in my ear,
The clock that tells the minutes in my brain. . . .
Nerves, nerves! O folly of a child who dreams
Of heaven, and, waking in the darkness, screams.

In his *Confessions* of 1930 he tells of the insanity which overcame him in Italy in 1908, his comparative happiness in an Italian hospital to which he was sent, because the lights were left on perpetually, and his terror and agony in the darkness in the English asylum where he lived for eighteen months.

In *London Nights* he speaks of Symbolism in connection with his poems: "The whole visible world itself, we are told, is but a symbol, made visible in order that we may apprehend

ourselves, and not be blown hither and thither like a flame in the night." His idea of Symbolism is expounded still further in *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* of 1899. He sees Symbolism partly as a release from the bondage of death, the fear of life, the fear of dreams: "Mystery is no longer feared, as the great mystery in whose midst we are islanded was feared by those to whom that unknown sea was only a great void." He writes at length of Maeterlinck, whose works make so much of mysticism as a philosophy of life. But in reading the whole book we feel that the philosophical and religious side of Symbolism meant very little to Symons. Possibly he felt at moments that the sense of an invisible life running through the whole of the universe gave a meaning to existence which destroyed in some measure his fears. On the whole when Symons writes about the mystical doctrines of the Symbolists he leaves us uninterested. The real attraction of the Symbolists to Symons lay in their literary method, their ideal of art. He speaks of Verlaine, Mallarmé and Maeterlinck as having as their common aim that of getting rid of "exteriority" and of rhetoric. As he says: "Description is banished that beautiful things may be evoked magically: the regular beat of verse is broken in order that words may fly, upon subtler wings."

About 1900 there comes a change in the tone of Symons's love poems. *The Prison* is a poem more sombre than his early ones but more real in tone: he feels that love is a binding force, and that although he is bound and miserable, yet he fears to be free.

Amongst the poems of 1906 *The Lovers of the Wind* has a new beauty, the elusive beauty of the Symbolists, the sad echoing notes of which we find again in his plays:

But he who loves the wind is like a man
Who loves a ghost, and by a loveliness
Ever unseen is haunted, and he sees
No dewdrop shaken from a blade of grass,
No handle lifted, yet she comes and goes,
And breathes beside him.

The whole poem is complete in beauty. No more is Symons

striving after a bizarre effect, no more is he crystallizing the actual moods of his personal experience without changing them into an æsthetic medium.

About this time in his life Symons's interest in nature increased. In his *Amends to Nature* of 1909 he says that he has wasted his life without the comradeship of things and following on this comes a series of nature poems. On the whole they are not among the more important of his writing. The most individual of his poems at this time are the sadly meditative ones such as *The Lovers of the Wind* and the *Wanderer's Lament* with its sad dirge on life:

Why was it that the world
 was made so ill
Or we that suffer it . . .
 he that made it
Loved not the thing he made, or tired of it,
Or could not end it; for he gave us life
And the body; and therewith he gave us dreams.

The anguish of the years about 1908 is reflected in *The Andante of Snakes* (1904) or in the solemn litany of *Nightmare* (1921).

The poetic plays were all written before the crisis in the life of Symons was past, the two minor ones being *The Death of Agrippina* and *Cleopatra in Judea* and the two outstanding ones, *The Harvesters* (1916), and *Tristan and Iseult* (1917).

It is in *Tristan and Iseult* that Symons is most clearly writing as a symbolist, and is at one with Yeats in his "dutiful waiting upon every symbol by which the soul of things can be made visible," as Symons describes it. Symons's interest in the work of other dramatists is confined chiefly to D'Annunzio and Maeterlinck. He has translated several of D'Annunzio's plays and *Tristan and Iseult* itself is dedicated to Eleonora Duse, chief interpreter of D'Annunzio. In *Tristan and Iseult* Symons takes a romantic subject, which has been treated in literature again and again, but both rhetoric and romantic conventionality are completely avoided. There is no trace of romantic sentimentality about *Tristan and Iseult*, and this is because Symons has deliberately

created his figures without personality. The people in D'Annunzio's plays are without personality, in order that they may fit in to the richly ornate decorative whole of the texture of his work. Maeterlinck's figures are but thin fragments of mist which drift here and there in the wind. Symons's *Tristan and Iseult* are not sunk out of sight in the rich background as are D'Annunzio's figures, nor are they blown apart by the wind as are Maeterlinck's, but they are intended by Symons to be vessels for emotion. The emotion is not full and overpowering and direct: it is purified and rarified, so as to suggest and not to express. In *The Symbolist Movement* Symons says that the love scene in Maeterlinck's *Pelleas and Mellisande* is the finest existing, because, as he says, the lovers are disembodied of the more trivial accidents of life, so that they can give themselves without limitation to the passionate interest. Fortunately by the time that Symons wrote his plays he had freed himself largely from the influence of Maeterlinck, so that he is not trying to express the "Intricate, almost invisible life which runs through the whole universe," the striving after mystical experience which muddies the stream of Maeterlinck's work. Symons's present problem is to separate emotion from its content the body, not that he wishes to depict non-passionate love, but that he wants to create the essence of passionate love formed from mind and body together.

In so far as Symons does achieve this aim he does it by cutting away from our consciousness the solid, the detailed mass of our world, and by calling before us the spaces of light and sea and sky. It is by his imagery that he gives us this release. The imagery of Symbolism, as we shall see in the works of Yeats, does not deal with a rich mass of material. The writer not only selects from the unorganized plenty of life, he cuts away association after association until, in his opinion, the one image will arouse the one single experience, the one pure emotion, untouched by the pressure of life.

Vengeance is but an arm that smites a sword
Into the empty, dark, and yielding air.

The mind starts by seeing an immense arm of vengeance

with the sword, it follows down the arm with the stroke and is then ready to give itself up to the imaginative experience of space, empty, dark and yielding. The emotion of love, too, has to be freed from its setting in life; Iseult speaks:

What is it that has set me free? I feel
 As if a boundless joy had given me wings.
 I am as universal as the sun.
 Look, Tristan, there is nothing there but light:
 Light in the sky, light in the hollow sea,
 The encircling and caressing light of the air!
 Light eats into my flesh and drinks me up:
 I am a cup for the immense thirst of light,
 I cannot see you, Tristan, for the light.

Love is merged in the emotion aroused by the sight of the sea when all land is lost to view. There is light in the sky, light in the hollow sea, light eats into her flesh, she is a cup for the *immense thirst* of light. Love is universalized, and we are caught up into the great bowl of sea and sky, where all is light.

Although the Symons of the play is far from the Symons of the 'nineties, in that, for the later Symons, material intended to take æsthetic form is not felt simply as a series of disconnected moods but as a complete harmonious whole, yet his writing is unequal, and not all his imagery can attain to true symbolism. We find this in Tristan's reply:

Iseult, I see you wrapped about with light
 As in a glory, clothed and garlanded,
 And your face shines, it dazzles me, your eyes
 Are burning out of brightness like two flames.

Tristan sees Iseult like a glory, with eyes shining like flames. We fall back on the commonplaces of love again; the intense radiance of sea and sky, the sense of being lifted up from life, as on an altar, isolated from all ordinary human experience, is lost. It is part of the way of writing of the Symbolists that the main texture of the work should be made as simple and as finely toned as possible, in order that the light of the moment of beauty may shine out with more

penetrating ray. But in the writing of Yeats there is never a use of imagery which we feel to be definitely wrong in tone, as we sometimes feel about Symons's use of it. The inner world of fantasy to Yeats is a completely harmonious imaginative whole, while in that of Symons there is a deep inner disharmony which suddenly tears in two the veil of his imagination.

Like Yeats, however, Symons has the gift most valued by the Symbolists of using words not endowed with special romantic significance, words and phrases almost like those of real life and of giving to them new and individual life by the rhythm of his speech: so Iseult speaks:

O what is love, and why is love so bitter
After the blinding sweetness of a moment?
I am afraid, I am afraid of love
This is some death that has got hold on me:
The night is coming back into my soul.
Tristan, I am afraid. If this is love,
I am afraid of the intolerable love.

The phrase "blinding sweetness" might be the conventional literary phrase which slips off our minds as water over the rock, but there is a sad haunting fatality in the subtle repetition of "love" and "death" and "night" which makes the lines one of the great achievements of the play.

Even in the 'nineties we find occasional poems by Symons showing that he felt the significance of the sea as a poetic motive. In *Tristan and Iseult* we find that the two lovers live in so far as they are merged with their background, the sea. Tristan comes across the sea to Iseult; it is on a voyage to Cornwall that the fatal draught of love is drunk; Tristan dies waiting for the white sail of Iseult's ship to appear on the horizon. Also the imagery which is most satisfying is that which lifts up the lovers against the vast round sky of the ocean.

The Harvesters has two motives in it: the beauty of Cornwall, and the peculiar character of its people, rigid and unbendable in its Nonconformist faith. Symons chose, surprisingly, the life of country people of modern, not mythical

times; he takes as his theme the love of Mary for her lover, Peter, his desertion of her when she is with child, the cold religious anger of her father and his sacred oath never to speak to his daughter again, Mary's murder of her lover in the cornfield, her return to the village after the death of her baby in prison, her refusal of home because of her father's religious hate, and her retreat with Vecchan, the homeless village "simple" maid. With such a subject Symons does not use the imagery of Symbolism, he does not make his figures vessels of emotion. Mary and her father, Michael, the real protagonists of the drama, are like statues standing in beautiful dynamic attitudes, typifying the sorrow of the world. Michael is obsessed by religious doctrine, ready to be sorry for the sinner, Peter, but humiliated by the damnation of the chosen, his daughter. He accepts it as his punishment that his daughter, "adulteress" and "murderess" should live with him, but for his oath's sake he will not speak with her. Mary matures through the tragedy, casts from her all conventional standards of approval and disapproval and sets forth her faith:

I gave myself for love
And I rejoice because I have known love.
It was for love, because I have known love,
I killed my lover, and because I was
A woman, and the mother of his child:
There also I have nothing to repent.
And always all my sorrow and this grief
Have come to me out of this terrible joy
That is the root of love. . . .
If we sin,
The very earth sins with us, and our life
Cries against things that are.

The language as well as the whole conception of the play is stern, simple, grave, solid, and to Symons, essentially a stylist, the use of imagery, except of the barest and plainest kind, would be wrong in the mouths of the two unbending, upright souls of Mary and Michael.

Symons is one of the few writers of to-day who in the

form of poetic drama can produce a beautiful and satisfying work of art, expressing a poetic idea in its own individual form. He does not wish to use poetry as a means of stating his ideas about life or as a way of exploring his own mind and feelings. His emotional conflicts are stilled, his personality dimmed, so that the emotion of love and the experience of tragic events may receive their form as poetic symbols.

CHAPTER X

W. B. YEATS

WILLIAM BUTLER YEATS was born in 1865, the son of an Irish artist. He spent his youth partly in Sligo and partly in London, and as a young man he joined the group of artists contributing to *The Yellow Book*. He was especially intimate with Arthur Symons and Lionel Johnson. From 1889 onwards he published poems and literary work of various kinds, including an edition of Blake, an Irish anthology, numerous essays and also dramas. Although his interests have always predominately been in Ireland, he has spent much of his time in London and in Paris, and he has always been cosmopolitan in his outlook. He has been a Director of the Abbey Theatre in Dublin since 1904, and a Senator of the Irish Free State since 1922, and in 1924 he was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature. His first poetic play, *Countess Kathleen*, was published in 1892, and it was followed by *The Land of Heart's Desire* (1894), *The Shadowy Waters* (1900), *The King's Threshold* and *On Baile's Strand* (1904), *Deirdre* (1907), *Four Plays for Dancers* (1921).

Yeats is the kind of artist who not only writes literature, but also writes about it, and his books of essays show us the theory on which he based his work. His life in London as a young man, his close association with Symons above all, had brought him under the influence of the French Symbolists, Rimbaud and Mallarmé, and into sympathy with their English followers.

"The scientific movement brought with it a literature, which was always tending to lose itself in externalities of all kinds, in opinion, in declamation, in picturesque writing, in word painting, or in what Mr. Symons has called an attempt

'to build in brick and mortar inside the covers of a book,' and now writers have begun to dwell upon the element of evocation, of suggestion, upon what we call the symbolism in great writers": so writes Yeats in *Symbolism of Poetry* (1900), and in his prose works there are constant references to the importance of symbolism for the understanding of his poetry. From the standpoint of our age it is difficult to see from the critical works of Yeats and Symons what is the new contribution to the theory of poetry that was made by the French Symbolists and by their English followers. The romantic poet has never wished to define clearly and completely the objects in his poem. Shelley, in his:

Thou in whose stream, mid the steep sky's commotion
Loose clouds like earth's decaying leaves are shed,
Shook from the tangled boughs of heaven and ocean

does not seek to give a definite visual image of the sky, the sea and the wind. We hear and see the sky, the sea, storm, wind, clouds, the sweep of trees. Shelley calls forth from our minds those associations with these objects that he needs, and a sweeping, triumphant, indefinable, elusive image is found. Our minds surge forward with it, but the structure of the image in our minds is a changing shifting one and cannot be described verbally. Yeats, if not the other Symbolists, did realize that the imagery of such writers as Shelley and Shakespeare does evoke and not describe. But the destructive criticism of the English Symbolists was probably aimed at such a writer as Kipling, whose imagery was always either clearly visual or audible, or at such a writer as Wells, who thought that all things could be explained by intellectual reasoning. The symbolist wished to "evoke" feeling—to bring into action the unconscious as well as the conscious mind, by using a symbol which would set going a train of associations. This is the method of Shakespeare and of Shelley and of the romantics generally. But the method has its disadvantages, from which the work of the symbolists is not always free, for if the imagery, the symbol used by the writer, has not the imaginative quality to enfold the mind of the reader, the reader may escape into his own emotive life,

and there stay in his own backwater, untouched by the author.

Yeats wishes to use not only a special kind of imagery, but also a new rhythm and verse suited to it. He wants to abandon "energetic rhythms as of a man running which are the invention of the will with its eyes always on something to be done or undone; and we would seek out those wavering, meditative, organic rhythms, which are the embodiments of the imagination, that neither desires nor hates, because it has done with time, and only wishes to gaze upon some reality, some beauty." Yeats wishes to slacken the bonds between the world of poetry and the world of everyday life, so that the mind may escape to the stream of real life, which remains constant through the changes of time.

In reciting this special kind of verse, according to Yeats, the actor should employ a technique the purpose of which is to distance the actor as much as possible, and to subdue his personality so that the harmony of the whole play is not disturbed. Poets, when they read their own works, make the words and the sounds speak themselves, and they do not want their verse to be made dramatic, by means of the actors' personality. Yeats wanted his actors to speak their words to musical notes, and his music was to be composed not as music for its own sake, but as something definitely subordinate to the words. He tells us in *Speaking to the Psaltery* (1902) that Dolmetsch, after listening to the reciting of verse by Yeats, made an instrument half psaltery, half lyre, containing all the chromatic intervals of the speaking voice, and that he taught Yeats to regulate his speech by ordinary musical notes. Yeats also worked with Florence Farr, an actress and a producer of Greek drama, and together they adapted the method of speech to his plays.

Yeats's theory of poetic drama and his technique was applied to a certain kind of material. All his life he has been an ardent enthusiast for Ireland, but he was not at any time a politician by nature and his avowed interest has been in two things, in the life of the country people in Ireland and their speech, and in the world of Irish myth and legend. In

1899 Yeats joined with Martyn, George Moore and Lady Gregory to found the Irish Literary Theatre. The founders of this theatre were divided in aim, for Martyn and George Moore were interested primarily in the continental type of drama, while Yeats and Lady Gregory wanted to use old legends and folk subjects for drama. In 1902 Martyn and George Moore gave up their association with the theatre, and the company became the Irish National Dramatic Company. At this date Yeats wrote of the aim of his theatre: "Our movement is a return to the people. . . . The play that is to give them a quite natural pleasure should tell them either of their own life, or of that life of poetry where every man can see his own image, because there alone does human nature escape from arbitrary conditions." Yeats has been a director of the company—which is now in the Abbey Theatre, Dublin—since its foundation, but the plays which it has produced, with the exception of a few verse plays by Yeats, have been almost entirely on the subject of contemporary life, rustic and urban. Yeats has written several plays with the assistance of Lady Gregory, and these plays are of the peasant type dealing with the actual life of the people and written in language similar to that which is in use by peasants. These plays were written by Yeats because of his devotion to a national movement rather than because the subjects themselves appealed to him. It is essential to Yeats that he should deal with legendary and mythical material, not because of the picturesque quality this possesses, but because it is to him the symbolic expression of the deep unconscious stream of living by which human waking life is encircled. In all his great poetic plays Yeats has cut himself off from any attempt at the realistic presentation of this world, and confined himself to the world of legend. Not in action or in the vigorous conscious working of the intellect is real life to be found, but in the state of trance in which visions of the beauty of the sensory world combine with the shadowy life of legend to form an approach to reality. And the work of the tragic writer is to summon up before his hearers' minds this world of vision, of prophecy, and to

evoke the greatness of the past. As Yeats says in *The Tragic Theatre* (1910): "The real world is not altogether rejected, it is but touched here and there, and into the places we have left empty we summon rhythm, balance, pattern, images that remind us of vast passions, the vagueness of past times, all the chimeras that haunt the edge of trance."

In his two earliest and best-known poetic plays, *The Countess Kathleen* (1892) and *The Land of Heart's Desire*, Yeats is using his legendary material, but he is combining his magical element with that of everyday life in the past. In the first play Yeats uses the old religious legend of starving people selling themselves to devils disguised as merchants, only to be redeemed by the Countess who sacrifices her soul for the suffering, and is carried to heaven as a reward.

In *The Land of Heart's Desire* the young peasant wife is enchanted by the fairies and, though her husband tries to keep her with him, she dies and goes to the fairy world for which she is longing.

In these plays Yeats seems to have a foot in two worlds, one in that of the peasant world, as portrayed by Lady Gregory, the other in his own world of fantasy. The difficulty of the fusion of these two worlds is very great, and has not been satisfactorily overcome by Yeats in either play. To the English person, if not to the Irish, neither the world of *Countess Kathleen* nor that of *The Land of Heart's Desire* seems complete; the reader is nearly won over at times in both plays but he is aware of a slight feeling of sentimentality or of artificiality, and he remains self-conscious instead of being merged in a new identity.

In order to achieve the harmony of mood which Yeats desires, the harmony which will make it possible for the spectator to pass from his own world to that of Yeats, it is necessary for Yeats to write of a subject which he feels to be symbolic. The subject of *Countess Kathleen* is allegorical and not a play symbolic of the state of being which Yeats wishes to represent; it is a play illustrating the precept that self-sacrifice is the highest of virtues. *The Land of Heart's Desire*

is an allegorical, not a symbolic, representation of the incompatible qualities of the contemplative and the active life. *The Shadowy Waters*, *The King's Threshold*, *Deirdre*, and *Four Plays for Dancers* give us the real Yeats, the Yeats who is forming myths symbolizing the emotional life of mankind into a pattern of beauty in which man can see his own life transformed.

The Shadowy Waters is said to be the play written by Yeats which he himself likes best, and it is this play and not his numerous and confusing mystical essays that brings us to the heart of the doctrine that:

All would be well
Could we but give us wholly to the dreams,
And get into their world that to the sense
Is shadow, and not linger wretchedly
Among substantial things, for it is dreams
That lift us to the flowing, changing world
That the heart longs for.

Yeats himself says that the play is not founded on any definite story, but is woven out of certain dream experiences. The play is not a discussion of Yeats's beliefs, but the actual creation of a dream world, poised in magic seas, where the real world seems a faint memory, and the people in this dream world are not so much individuals as translucent vessels of emotion.

In *The Shadowy Waters*, the hero Forgael, captain of a pirate ship, has a passionate desire to reach a shining world in which the women cast no shadows and where love's experiences will no longer be imperfect; he is lured to it by the spirits of the dead who have turned into man-headed birds, and fly around the ship, calling him to adventure. The crew plot his death, but they fear the power of his magic harp. Aibric, his friend, urges him to give up his useless quest, and reproaches him for seeking from life that which life cannot give. Love at its best is ephemeral and unsatisfying, but Forgael cannot be dissuaded:

It's not a dream,
But the reality that makes our passion
As a lamp shadow—no—no lamp, the sun.
What the world's million lips are thirsting for,
Must be substantial somewhere

and again:

I can see nothing plain; all's mystery.
Yet, sometimes there's a torch inside my head
That makes all clear, but when the light is gone
I have but images, analogies,
The mystic bread, the sacramental wine,
The red rose where the two shafts of the cross,
Body and soul, waking and sleep, death, life,
Whatever meaning ancient allegorists
Have settled on, are mixed into one joy,
. . . But when the torch is lit
All that is impossible is certain,
I plunge in the abyss.

The sailors see a richly laden vessel with a king and queen embracing on the deck and they go and capture the ship and kill the king. The queen, Dectora, comes and reproaches Forgael for the murder of her husband, the golden-armed Iollan. He goes into a kind of trance in which he sees her as the woman the magic birds have sent to him, almost against his will. When she commands him to let her go he says:

But if I were to put you on that ship,
With sailors that were sworn to do your will,
And you had spread your sail for home, a wind
Would rise of a sudden, or a wave so huge,
It had washed among the stars and put them out,
And beat the bulwark of your ship on mine,
Until you stood before me on the deck—
As now.

Forgael plays his magic harp, and the sailors pass into a state of dream. Dectora, too, dreams and identifies Forgael with Iollan. He repents of his deception and tells her that he is not Iollan, but she, entranced, replies:

What do I care,
Now that my body has begun to dream,
And you have grown to be a burning coal
In the imagination and intellect?

He shows her the magic birds in the far distance, and once more asks her if she will not return to land with Aibric in her own ship. But she will not, and the sailors leave the lovers, and she exclaims triumphantly:

The sword is in the rope—
The rope's in two—it falls into the sea,
It whirls into the foam. O ancient worm,
Dragon that loved the world and held us to it,
You are broken, you are broken. The world drifts away,

Yeats's idealistic vision of an inner, more perfect, remote world, reflected only by the world we know, is symbolized here in the strange legend of an escape from real life to one of a magical fruition of love, an escape from the dragon which consumes our lives to the magic seas beyond its power.

The imagery that Yeats uses in *The Shadowy Waters* is different from the kind of imagery that he was to use once or twice in the play, *Deirdre*, published seven years later, and predominantly in his more recent work, *Four Plays for Dancers*. The use of imagery that Yeats finally evolved has the effect on the mind that a light and secret touch in the darkness has on the body. The imagery in *The Shadowy Waters* is more like that of other romantic poets; it stimulates and rouses to dispersed activity the imagination of the reader. The red rose, the lit torch, the sacramental wine, the ancient worm and dragon of the world, are symbolic images, but they are simple universal ones, common to mankind; they are not images which only derive their symbolism from the intense individual emotion of the moment as are those of Yeats's later work. And much of the imagery of *The Shadowy Waters*, such as, "the shivering casting-net of the stars," "the wave so huge, it had washed among the stars and put

them out," is only symbolic in the general sense that the imagery in *The West Wind* is symbolic, that is to say, it does not describe, but evokes associations from the reader's mind which build up a new experience and one that his mind by itself, and without the stimulus of the poet, could not create.

The attitude of Yeats to his plays, as to his poems, is experimental. His bibliography is extraordinarily complicated, and it is only with the help of A. J. Symons's bibliography of the first editions of Yeats that one can attempt a solution of it. For Yeats is in the habit of re-writing his poems and plays many times, and he often publishes several versions of them. His plays are amended, not only for the sake of their ultimate perfection as literature, but also that they may be more fitted for stage production. So *The Shadowy Waters* was first published as a dramatic poem in *Later Poems* 1899-1905. It was performed in this version in 1904 in Dublin, but completely re-written and condensed for the performance in 1906, also in Dublin. On the whole *The Shadowy Waters* loses by this condensation. We are given a less full version of the vision of Forgael, and the talk between Forgael and Dectora is cut short, so that it is not clear, as it is in *Later Poems*, that Forgael's quest will make his love immortal as that of the bird souls. Also Dectora's cry: "I am a woman, I die at every breath," Dectora's passionate assertion of the value of the moment, the clinging of the woman to the familiar world, is inexplicable without its earlier context.

Deirdre, which was first played at the Abbey Theatre in 1906, was altered in one scene before Mrs. Patrick Campbell played the same part in 1907. Yeats says that when Mrs. Patrick Campbell rehearsed the part it was illuminated for him, and he inserted the incident of Deirdre adorning herself with jewels on her entrance in the play. Later he revised it still further in smaller details.

In *Deirdre*, Yeats is using as one of his subjects the most famous of the Irish legends, one which has been used also by Synge. Deirdre, a young girl of unknown parents, lived in a house in a wood, alone except for an old nurse. She was protected by the old king, Conchubar, and she became his

affianced wife. Just before her wedding day she took the hero, Naisi, as her lover, and fled with him and his two brothers. For nine years they lived as exiles in the woods in remote islands, but they returned in response to promises of friendship from the king. Conchubar was treacherous and seized the lovers and demanded Deirdre as his bride. When she refused to go with him he killed Naisi, and Deirdre killed herself rather than be false to her lover.

Yeats takes only a small part of this legend for his play—the arrival of the lovers at the meeting-place with Conchubar, their discovery of Conchubar's treachery and their death. In *Deirdre*, Yeats is creating the kind of drama which is peculiarly his own, drama which seeks to represent mood rather than the clash of lives. For to Yeats, action in itself, in life or on the stage, is valueless, and personality is unimportant. The emotion of love, the feeling of beauty is to Yeats the direct reflection of the inner life he values, and hence, in *Deirdre*, he wishes to create the mood, the emotional tone of the crisis in the lovers' lives. Deirdre and Naisi are not dynamic people; they are poised for ever in their beauty, sorrowing for, and yet accepting, their immanent doom. Yeats cuts away the vast expanse of life, and gazes at the one clearing in the dim wood of life, the wood in which stands the little house of Deirdre's childhood, where her death comes to her.

The note of doom in *Deirdre* is sounded by the wandering women musicians, who before the arrival of the lovers tell the story of their past. Though Fergus, the friend of the king and of the lovers, reasons with them they refuse to believe that an old man's jealousy can pass away, and they point out to Fergus the dark barbaric men outside the window who are a menace to the safety of the lovers. When Deirdre herself appears she is shown as a creature of the woods, wild at heart, who suspects and fears capture by the king. They hint at danger to her and, when questioned, they tell of the preparations the king is making in order to capture her.

1st Musician: There are strange, miracle-working, wicked stones
Men tear out of the heart and the hot brain
Of Libyan dragons

- Deirdre* The hot Istain stone,
And the cold stone of Fanes, that have power
To stir even those at enmity to love.
- 1st Musician* They have so great an influence, if but sewn
In the embroideries that curtain in
The bridal bed.
- Deirdre* O Mover of the stars
That made this delicate house of ivory,
And made my soul its mistress, keep it safe.
- 1st Musician* I have seen a bridal bed, so curtained in,
So decked for miracle in Conchubar's house,
And learnt that a bride's coming

The moment is the centre of the drama, for it is now, and not later when the messenger of the king comes, that Deirdre knows that she has been betrayed. It is the imagery, the symbolic imagery of Yeats, that rouses in us the feeling of doom. We think of the magic fateful handkerchief of Othello. We feel the dark turbulent power of that play; in the remote depths of our minds stir the memories of the legends of enchantment, of fated instruments of death. Yeats is not using surface literary reminiscences, he is drawing upon a central source of dread and beauty.

At times, in his imagery in *Deirdre*, Yeats is deliberately separating himself and his readers from the rich associations which the vast expanse of life's emotional and sensory experience provide for all men in varying degrees. Deirdre offers to give herself to Conchubar if only Naisi may go free, and Naisi cries out:

O my eagle!
Why do you beat vain wings upon the rock
When hollow night's above?

In an image of this kind Yeats does not wish the mind to pass from one experience to another, increasing the intensity of experience as it proceeds; he does not wish the mind to dive into the waters of the well of legend and enchantment, bringing up its individual riches. He wants only single qualities of bird, of wings, of rock, of night, which symbolize the uselessness of Deirdre's struggle against the inevitable calm of death.

The elegiac nature of the play, its static condition, is preserved by the way in which Naisi accepts the news, brought by the messenger, that he is betrayed:

What need is there
For all that ostentation at my setting?
I have loved truly and betrayed no man.
I need no lightning at the end, no beating
In a vain fury at the cage's door . .

and while they wait the lovers play at the chessboard, used years before by fated lovers. When Naisi is killed and Deirdre kills herself, and Conchubar is left defeated but still supreme in his feelings of kingship, it is musicians who seal the play with their elegy:

1st Musician: They are gone, they are gone
2nd Musician: Whispering were enough
1st Musician: Into the secret wilderness of their love.
2nd Musician: A high, grey cairn What more is to be said?
1st Musician: Eagles have gone into their cloudy bed

The sphere of Yeats is limited in the kind of poetic drama represented by *The Shadowy Waters* and *Deirdre*. Of action there is very little in his dramas, and what action there is in *Deirdre* is not important for its own sake. The deaths of the lovers are foredoomed and inevitable, and though there is suspense as to how the end will come, there is a certainty that it is coming. Deirdre and Naisi, Dectora and Forgael are not human beings with individual characteristics; they are seen far back in the history of the race as dream symbols, as beings through which emotions pass like the wind. But Yeats is not trying to create action or human beings; his drama is the drama of mood which is poetically significant. The fantasy of his own mind and the fantasy of the race is valued and changed into drama, because Yeats regards them as symbolical of fundamental emotions in human beings. He hopes to arouse these emotions in his audience and transform their conflict into harmony by plunging them into a drama of mood, in which all elements are formed into a pattern. Imagery, song, myth, and dream, are woven together, and as the audience sees and hears the play, it becomes sub-

merged by its mood and loses its own being in that of the work of art.

Yeats at all times found the close association between realism and the theatre an irksome bondage. Whatever may be the author's view of drama, the actual physical conditions of the stage and the relationship of the actors to the audience does tend in Europe to make the tradition of the theatre realistic. Even so early as 1900 Yeats was rebelling against this and prophesying that: "The theatre of art, when it comes to exist, must therefore discover grave and decorative gestures . . . and grave and decorative scenery, that will be forgotten the moment an actor has said, 'It is dawn.'" (*Ideas of Good and Evil*.) He is aiming here at movements of the actor's body and a decoration of the stage which will be symbolic of emotion and not a realistic representation. The experiments that Yeats made with Dolmetsch and Florence Farr, in devising a method of reciting verse to notes, have as their object the distancing of the actor, the elimination of his own personality in so far as it is possible, in order that the words and the verse itself may retain their objective purity. Both *Deirdre* and *The Shadowy Waters* are dramas of the mind and of the emotions; they are detached from ordinary life, and by symbolism they express Yeats's inner world. But they did not seem to Yeats to be written in the ideal form of drama, and it is this form that he finds in the Nō plays of Japan.

The Japanese Nō drama is an aristocratic form of drama which first appeared in the fourteenth century, and many of the plays then written are still performed to-day. This Nō drama is intended for a small audience in a small theatre, and the relationship between the audience and the performers is an intimate one. There are two chief actors, the "skit₁," the principal one, and the "wak₁," the second in importance to him, and they speak, act and dance. The dresses worn by the actors are magnificent, and the masks, worn by the "skit₁" and his subordinates, are beautifully carved and handed down from one generation to another. On the rear wall of the stage, and on one of the walls to the side, trees are

painted, and this, apart from simple properties such as an open framework which represents a boat or a chariot, is all the scenery there is. There is a chorus of ten or twelve people who sit in a side extension of the stage, and players of drums and a flute who sit behind the stage, though in view, and it is the work of the player of the drum to maintain the ground rhythm for the voice, and for the stamping of the foot in the slow and solemn dance which takes place in every play. In the Nō plays there is achieved a subtle relationship between music, dance and speech, in which no one of these is dominant.

The subjects treated by the Nō dramatists are legendary and from literary sources, and in many of the plays a ghost appears in his own person or he takes possession of one of his own characters, so that we are looking back into the lives of the people and viewing their emotions far down the stretch of human life. This does not mean that they are unreal to us, but that they are distanced and seen in perspective to life as a whole.

So in Seami's *Atsumori*, a priest, formerly the warrior Kunagai, arrives on the stage, saying that he has come to pray for the soul of Atsumori, whom he has killed in battle. The ghost of Atsumori talks with him of the battle, and, as his excitement increases, Atsumori dances his dance symbolic of battle, while the chorus chants. He tries to strike the priest with his sword, but, remembering their prayer together for his soul, he puts his sword down in friendship.

In another play, *Sotoba Komachi*, two priests talk about the dream-like nature of life as they journey, visiting shrines. They rebuke an aged beggar woman for profaning a holy relic, but she tells them that once she has been Komachi, a woman famed for great beauty, and they sorrow for her. She becomes possessed by the spirit of her most passionate lover, Shosho, whose entreaties in life she had ignored. In his person she travels through rain and storm to see the loved object, and in his person she feels the agony of death. Finally the spirit leaves her and she prays for peace in Buddha.

The writers of these plays, and plays of similar subjects, were interested in emotions rather than in action, and they sought to give a sense of life as a whole; they wished to purify emotions from their temporal qualities and leave behind only the universal, and their aim might be said to be the representation in drama of the ancient oriental landscape. In all the plays a journey is taken and the scenery passed through is described, and this fact gives a clue to the intention of the authors. The elegiac mood is the one sought; life can be seen truly from a distance through the glass of meditation. The distancing is brought about in part by the fact that the individuality of one character is not clearly differentiated from that of another; the actors will often speak of themselves in the third person, while the chorus will sometimes speak the actor's words for him, sometimes relate events.

These figures, distanced from ordinary life by these means, are yet bound in an intimate relationship to the emotional life of the audience. The beauty of dancing, poetry, song, and colour forms a subtle harmony which affects the complex emotional life of the individual spectator, so that he is freed from his own limiting personality and becomes part of a richer life, which is outside and yet within him.

Yeats knew the Nō plays only through translation, but he studied them with the help of a Japanese dancer, and his genius was peculiarly fitted to understand a form of art, characteristically Eastern; something subtle and yet sensuous, something which could get past the envelope of life to the inner harmony felt in time of trance, this is what Yeats wanted, and what he found in the Nō dramas. As he says in his *Cutting of an Agate* (1919): "The arts which interest me, while seeming to separate from the world and us, a group of figures, images, symbols, enable us to pass for a few minutes into a deep of the mind, that had otherwise been too subtle for habitation." And for Yeats one of the essential secrets of his art was the use of dancing in poetic drama. He speaks

of his Japanese drama as being able "to recede from us into some more powerful life." Yeats realized that the aim of the poetic dramatist is to remove the pressure of self from his audience so that it may reach this more powerful life, and this aim is most perfectly brought about by the union of dance and music and verse.

Four Plays for Dancers (1921) was the book of plays which Yeats wrote with the new form of dramatic art in his mind. The volume consists of *The Dreaming of the Bones* and *The Only Jealousy of Emir* (1919), *At the Hawk's Well* (1917), and *Calvary*. Only one of these plays, *At the Hawk's Well*, had been performed at the time of publication, but Yeats intended the method of production to be the same in all four plays. *At the Hawk's Well* was performed for the first time in 1916 in an ordinary room without a platform, and the stage was a bare space in front of a wall against which was placed a patterned screen. Three musicians played certain instruments—drum, gong and zither, and also marked the beginning and end of the play by the ceremony of the folding of the cloth. This ceremony is as follows: during their song the first musician, standing still in the central point of the front stage holds a black cloth, while the two other musicians walk toward the back of the stage, holding the two ends of the cloth so that it forms a triangle with the first musician as the apex. While the cloth is being held in this manner actors can arrive on the stage or leave it, and simple stage properties can be placed there: in addition its unfolding and folding is a sign that the play begins or ends. Masks were worn in *At the Hawk's Well* by the speaking characters—the Old and the Young Man; the musician and the dancer, the Guardian of the Well, had their faces painted to resemble masks. The masks and the costumes were designed by Dulac, who also composed the music for the songs and dancing; Yeats, in his preface to *Four Plays*, suggests that typical masks might be made by artists and used for several plays. The central situation of this play, as in all the plays, was the dance; in *At the Hawk's Well* the dancer was the Japanese Ito, and it

was the wish of Yeats that the dancing in all his plays should be formal, resembling that of marionettes, and not human and personal.

The subject matter of all the four plays of the volume is symbolic and is connected with an account of some of the mystical doctrines of the Arabs found in the papers of Robartes, which Yeats was editing at the time of the writing of these plays. The theories deal with the different grades of spiritual life found amongst men, and of the grades of incarnation which take place throughout life. Men are divided into subjective and objective types, or as they are more commonly called introverted and extraverted types, that is to say people whose centre of interest is in the mind within, and those whose interest is in people and objects outside the mind. Birds and animals follow the same type, the solitary birds such as the heron, the hawk, the swan being subjective, the herd animal such as the dog being objective.

In his play, *Calvary*, Yeats wished to use the symbolism of Robartes and the theatrical technique of the Nō plays to show the loneliness of Christ in his death on the cross. To Yeats, Christ was an objective nature, whose emotions turned outwards to humanity, and Yeats wants to show that there are certain types which could not be touched by him—the purely subjective type absorbed in his own being which is symbolized by the heron and solitary birds, the intellectual antagonistic type found in the Lazarus and Judas of the play, and the brutalized objective type found in the Roman soldiers. Yeats also used the ideas, found in Robartes, as well as elsewhere, that the dead dream themselves back into their past experiences where these are painful and intense.

The play opens with the folding of the curtain by the musicians and the song of the heron, with the refrain, "God has not died for the white heron." Christ's dream of pain and loneliness begins:

Good Friday's come,
The day whereon Christ dreams His passion through.
He climbs up hither but as a dreamer climbs

The cross that but exists because He dreams it
Shortens His breath and wears away His strength.
And now He stands amid a mocking crowd,
Heavily breathing

The three chief players are masked, and this makes possible the scene in which Lazarus appears with a corpse-like face, claiming death from Christ. He has sought death in vain in Christ's lifetime:

For four whole days
I had been dead and I was lying still
In an old comfortable mountain cavern
When you came climbing there with a great crowd
And dragged me to the light

Still angry, he abandons Christ, and the musicians sing how

The crowd shrinks backward from the face that seems
Death stricken and death hungry still.

Judas comes, hating Christ, because He is God and omnipotent. The Roman soldiers gamble indifferent to Christ, and dance a gamblers' dance round the cross. Christ cries, "My Father, why hast Thou forsaken Me," and the musicians fold the curtains singing once more of the symbolic birds, the swan, the sea-birds, untouched by Christ.

1st Musician But where have last year's cygnets gone?
The lake is empty why do they fling
White wing out beside white wing?
What can a swan need but a swan?

2nd Musician God has not appeared to the birds

At The Hawk's Well and *The Only Jealousy of Emir* both take as their hero Cuchulain of the Irish legend. A woman of the Sidhe, half hawk, half human, brings to Cuchulain the enchantment of loneliness and breaks for him all human ties. The hawk, in these plays as in *Calvary*, stands for the meditative part of human beings, the part which cannot be completely won by human love. *At The Hawk's Well* gains its effect on the audience's mind by the creation of the setting of the play, the lonely hillside by the sea. But following the

example of the Nō players Yeats casts away all attempt at scenery, and depends upon the musicians to evoke the scene in the song:

I call to the eye of the mind
 A well long choked up and dry
 And boughs long stripped by the wind,
 And I call to the mind's eye
 Pallor of an ivory face,
 Its lofty dissolute air,
 A man climbing up to a place
 The salt sea wind has swept bare.

The description is bare, only the elementals are left; the language is symbolic, not in the sense that it builds up a rich pattern within the mind, but in that it gives the object's vital rhythm of form.

An old man who has spent his life waiting for the welling up of the water giving everlasting life meets the young Cuchulain who has sailed across the seas to find it. The Hawk woman, guardian of the well, dances her magic dance, the water gushes up from the dry well, while the old man sleeps and the young man rushes out after the dancer:

What are those cries?
 What is that sound that runs along the hill?
 Who are they that beat a sword upon a shield?
Old Man: She has roused up the fierce women of the hills,
 Eofe, and all her troop, to take your life,
 And never till you are lying in the earth,
 Can you know rest

The Only Jealousy of Emir uses the Cuchulain legend again, but Cuchulain is no longer young. As Yeats shows us in *On Baile's Strand* Cuchulain kills his unknown son in contest by arms, and overcome with grief he rushes in madness into the waves, beating them down before him. In this later play he is shown lying in grave-clothes on his bed, while Emir his wife says that he is not dead, but in the dream state before death from which it is possible to call people back to life. In this play the use of masks is very important to Yeats for he is dealing with a subject found in many Nō

plays, that of demonic possession, and by a change of mask he signifies whether the person speaking is the demon or the spirit. The demon is that of Bricriu of the Sidhe—the maker of discord—and when Eithne, the mistress of Cuchulain, feels his face she turns and flies from the house in terror, although Emir begs her to stay and call back Cuchulain to life. This demon tells Emir that she must give up all claim to the companionship of old age with Cuchulain or else the Sidhe will take him in death. A figure crouches on the floor similar to that of the demon Cuchulain on the bed and this is the dream Cuchulain, for

A dream is body;
The dead move ever towards a dreamless youth
And when they dream no more return no more

The woman of the Sidhe, masked and gleamingly metallic in appearance, comes in and tempts this dream Cuchulain to give himself in death to her. She dances her dance of enchantment, but memories of his past life disturb Cuchulain's mind till she cries:

Then kiss my mouth. Though memory
Be beauty's bitterest enemy
I have no dread, for at my kiss
Memory on the moment vanishes:
Nothing but beauty can remain.

Cuchulain is about to abandon himself to her when Emir gives up her claim upon his friendship in their old age, and the woman of the Sidhe loses her power. The ghost goes back to his memories:

How could you know
That man is held to those whom he has loved
By pain they gave, or pain that he has given,
Intricacies of pain

The Sidhe people flee away and Cuchulain returns to life and to the arms of his mistress; the curtain folders bring us back to the calmness of meditation with their song.

The Dreaming of the Bones makes use of the same legend found in *Calvary*—that the dead dream themselves back into

their lives' tragic experiences; but the hero and the heroine of the play are Irish legendary figures and therefore Yeats can treat his subject with greater freedom. And in *The Dreaming of the Bones*, perhaps the most beautiful of Yeats's *Four Plays*, he creates for us a space in time in which love and the supernatural are at one with nature. It is the musicians who open the play by singing of the legend of the dreams of the dead, they give the note of suspense, of alarm in the quick rhythm of the words:

Why does my heart beat so?
Did not a shadow pass?
It passed but a moment ago
Who can have trod in the grass?

In our minds the dead arise, and as they speak, their passion bursts into flower again.

Have not old writers said
That dizzy dreams can spring
From the dry bones of the dead?
And many a night it seems
That all the valley fills
With those fantastic dreams.
They overflow the hills,
So passionate is a shade,
Like wine that fills to the top
A grey-green cup of jade,
Or maybe an agate cup

In this drama of Yeats, as in the Nō plays, the setting, the dim world in which the people move, determines the tone of the play, and it is for the musician to describe the windy solitary night

Somewhere among great rocks on the scarce grass
Birds cry, they cry their loneliness
Even the sunlight can be lonely here,
Even hot noon is lonely

A young man, trying to escape from the pursuit of the English in Ireland, appears and talks to a stranger, who warns him against ghosts abroad that night, but offers to show him

the way to the coast that he is seeking. The musicians again take up their part and describe the path the two take as they journey:

And now they have climbed through the long grassy field
And passed the ragged thorn trees and the gap
In the ancient hedge, and the tomb-nested owl
At the foot's level beats with a vague wing.

The stranger and his companion the Young Girl, who are shades, talk in turn, as if one person, of the sad fate of two persons,

. but shadows,
Hovering between a thorn tree and a stone.

They can embrace but never kiss, because they have committed a dreadful crime, the memory of which will keep them always apart unless someone of their race can forgive them. It is at this point that Yeats gives his dance a central place in the play, and gives to it a more significant æsthetic purpose than it has in any of the other three plays. For the dance is the dramatic event which gathers up as in a centre the suspense, the sorrow and the passionate longing of the lovers. We are to receive the impression of the poetic significance of the dance not only from the symbolic beauty of movement but from the effect that it has upon the young Irish fugitive. He has not guessed that his companions are the shades of the hated Dermot and Dervorgilla, but as they dance he sinks into a trance state in which their emotion passes into him, and he realizes their identity and suffers and loves with them:

Why do you dance?

Why do you gaze, and with so passionate eyes,
One on the other, and then turn away,
Covering your eyes, and weave it in a dance?
Who are you? What are you? you are not natural.

Young Girl Seven hundred years our lips have never met.

Young Man. Why do you look so strangely at one another.
So strangely and so sweetly?

Young Girl. Seven hundred years

Young Man: So strangely and so sweetly. All the ruin,
 All, all their handiwork is blown away
 As though the mountain air had blown it away
 Because their eyes have met. They cannot hear,
 Being folded up and hidden in their dance.
 The dance is changing now. They have dropped their
 eyes,
 They have covered up their eyes as though their hearts
 Had suddenly been broken—never, never
 Shall Dermot and Dervorgilla be forgiven.
 They have drifted in the dance from rock to rock.
 They have raised their hands as though to snatch the sleep
 That lingers always in the abyss of the sky
 Though they can never reach it. A cloud floats up
 And covers all the mountain head in a moment;
 And now it lifts and they are swept away.

The simple but subtle style with its effect of repetition weighs upon us; it is as if repeated blows of sorrow fall upon the hearers. And with this comes the feeling of passionate absorption:

They cannot hear,
 Being folded up and hidden in their dance.

In the end it is nature, the night of the "tomb-nested owl", which absorbs them. The intense emotion of the dance fades away with the shades of the night, the young man goes on his way, and the musicians are left rejoicing that the morning light has returned and:

At the grey round of the hill
 Music of a lost kingdom,
 Runs, runs and is suddenly still.

The *Four Plays* brings us once more to the question of what symbolism means to Yeats. In certain poems of Blake the symbol and the thing symbolized grow together and flower into perfect form, but Blake was a visionary in a sense that Yeats was not, for to Blake the world within his mind was real and concrete in a way that the world outside could never hope to be. The prophetic books of Blake are obscure because the world we see lost all reality to him, and became

completely obscured by the flaming light of the world within him. The mind of Yeats is of a different order; he does not see visually a world within him, of which the world of objects is only a distorted far-away image. His mind is subtle intellectually; it delights in its own exercise and in the perpetual seeking into the far corners of erudite doctrines of the mind and its being. Many of his poems therefore are written not to shadow forth the real world within him, as are Blake's, but as poetical manifestations of an intellectual idea.

The Four Plays illustrate this side of Yeats's nature, his absorbing interest in the intricacies of esoteric doctrines, in the ranks of souls and spheres of living of which Theosophists write so much. Yeats became greatly interested in Theosophy as a young man, and throughout his life he is fascinated by the idea of peeling off skin after skin from the nut of meaning. In *Calvary*, as we have seen, Yeats illustrates symbolically the Arabian mystical doctrines found in Robartes's papers. We are told in the notes to the play that the herons and solitary birds symbolize subjective temperaments, and with this knowledge the musicians' song before and after the Calvary scene fits into the scheme of the play; but this information seems to come to us from without the play, and therefore to be æsthetically injurious. Though the speeches of Lazarus are arresting and beautiful, the play does not form a complete whole; there are intellectual ideas in the play and there is emotion, but these things are not fused. The symbolism of the intellect, fascinating as it is to the mind of Yeats, hinders rather than helps the creation of an æsthetic world, complete in itself and free from our world. But symbolism to Yeats means different things at different times, and there is a sense in which it is a living power within his mind. The vital imaginative symbolism in Yeats is that in which his heroic figures of ancient legend stand as symbols of the deep imaginative life of mankind. To a child, the giant, the unconquerable hero, the captured maiden, the sorcerer are real inhabitants of an intensely real world, only partially detached from his own waking one. The adult is separated from this world, but these figures exist in his

dream life, symbolizing desires and struggles in the depths of his mind, just as these figures symbolized the desires and struggles of the race life in the past. To Yeats these heroic figures, these legendary lovers, these lost spirits open the world of reality, the world he is always trying to escape to, from the life we know, the world in which deep unconscious being flows. It is this world he is seeking when he speaks of "the vast passions, the vagueness of past times, all the chimeras that haunt the edge of trance."

With the true symbolic subject which we find in *The Four Plays* comes the image which the symbolist seeks, the image bringing the element of evocation, of suggestion. In *The Four Plays* the image which draws up the wealth of the mind such as "the hot Istain stone, and the cold stone of Fanes" of *Deirdre* is gone. Instead we have the kind of writing which cuts the mind free from the mind's store. The image in *Deirdre*,

O my eagle,
Why do you beat vain wings upon the rock
When hollow night's above?

is of this kind, as is the image in *The Dreaming of the Bones*,
And the tomb-nested owl
At the foot's level beats with a vague wing

In both these images the language is pared down, so that the mind is cleansed of all confusing haphazard wealth and only essential form is left behind. But, whereas in *Deirdre* naked image appears side by side with the adorned one, in *Four Plays* Yeats makes no use of images calling up a wealth of association. In these plays Yeats is dwelling not on character nor on action, but on mood, the mood of suspense, of suffering, of beauty expressed in terms of legend. Above all in the greatest of these plays he is giving to nature the expression of these emotions, and it is by means of his peculiar imagery that Yeats achieves this expression.

The advantage of the dramatic method Yeats uses in *Four Plays* is that it makes it possible for him to have in his audience only those people who care for poetry. In his note on

At the Hawk's Well he speaks of the suffering he experienced sitting behind unsympathetic listeners to one of his plays in an ordinary theatre in London. Even in the Abbey Theatre of which he has always been a director Yeats has found it difficult to find the right kind of audience for his plays. Yet Yeats believes himself, rightly, to be a dramatist, and he says: "I feel most alive at the moment when a roomful of people share the one lofty emotion." He does not believe in democracy in the theatre, and indeed, in the history of England's theatre never has there been popular appreciation of poetic drama simply as an art, nor will there ever be. His ideal therefore is to have an audience of fifty people who are lovers of poetry, and he speaks with enthusiasm of the first performance of *At the Hawk's Well* when he had such an audience, and of the fact that his "muses were but half welcome" when the play was given again to a fashionable audience of three hundred people, including Queen Alexandra.

The new dramatic method which Yeats uses does away with the necessity for making use of the commercial theatre, for his plays need no stage accessories. The device of curtain-raising means that no drop-curtain is used; the use of masks and of descriptive song makes stage lighting and scenery unnecessary. From Yeats's point of view the æsthetic advantages of his method are many; for the masking of the actors, the chanting of the verse, the use of the musicians' song, all have the effect of distancing the actors, of cutting them off from ordinary life. Yet the arts of poetry, design, music and dance, while they bring about this distancing, cause a feeling of æsthetic harmony in the whole being of the audience, so that the poet and the audience are at one.

This dramatic method of Yeats seems to promise a new future to poetic drama, but from the practical point of view there is one fatal difficulty in producing his plays, and that is the necessity for the use of a dancer. In the performance of *At the Hawk's Well* Yeats employed a Japanese dancer, but it is improbable that any English dancer could conceive

of dancing, as do the Japanese, as an impersonal art which is part of a great æsthetic whole of poetry, music, dancing, design. The plays would be for this reason impossible for English amateurs to act, and it is probable that other writers in this drama of mood must make modifications in the method of Yeats if their plays are to be staged.

CHAPTER XI

GORDON BOTTOMLEY

GORDON BOTTOMLEY is not a pioneer in literature; his aim has never been to cut himself off from the tradition of the past and to seek a new form which shall express the spirit of new times. He is not bound to the past, as was Stephen Phillips, in the sense that he uses in a modified form the traditional modes of feeling and expression of romantic drama, but he turns his mind backwards to the source of beauty he finds in the literature and legend of the past. He is a man with a great enthusiasm for the artistic work of others, and he finds his stimulus consciously and unconsciously in the imaginative productions of other minds than his own. The admired figure of his youth, as he tells us in the dedication before *Gruach*, was Rossetti. He found in him:

The lost Italian vision, the passionate
Vitality of art more rich than life,
More real than the day's reality.

Gordon Bottomley is a poet who found the beauty he was seeking in nature as well as in art, but he sought from art the richness of atmosphere, the elaborate arrangement of colour, the complexity of associations, which he could not find within his own mind, or in the countryside in which he lived. Rossetti attracted him especially because he was both a painter and a poet, and it is difficult to think of his painting and poetry apart from each other. *The Blessed Damosel* cannot be thought of merely as a poem; it arouses a picture in our minds which has in it elements of Rossetti's pictures. In painting he frequently chose legendary and literary subjects—Beatrix, Dante, Proserpina, Paolo and Francesca—and

though in some of the pictures considerations of colour and form are all-important, in others it is a literary idea which he is seeking to express. In both his painting and his poetry there is that pre-occupation with a central source of feeling, a hidden life which rises up almost in view only to be enclosed again in the obscure wood of Rossetti's inner life. Gordon Bottomley saw in Rossetti that presentation of a rich secret enclosed life "more rich than life, more real than the day's reality," that splendid elaborate texture woven from the literature and the legend of the past which he had been seeking.

Rossetti was the predominant influence in Gordon Bottomley's youth, but after him and later in life come the painters, Shannon and Ricketts. Both these painters were connected very closely with literature. For some years they controlled the Vale Press, an artist-printers' firm, while Ricketts was famous for the stage scenery he designed of the "literary" type, as well as for his paintings. Shannon himself belongs to the long line of literary painters. He, like Rossetti, turns to legend and myth for the subject of his painting, though like Titian his emphasis is on mass for its own sake, rather than, as with Rossetti, on the expression of a strange inward intensity in terms of colour and form. In the work of Shannon and Ricketts, Gordon Bottomley found once again what he was seeking, the revival of the past, the bodying of pictorial romance.

Gordon Bottomley has an enthusiasm for these painters, who perhaps not unfairly may be described as literary painters, that is to say painters who depend more upon the associations which their work can arouse in the mind of the beholder than upon the relations of form and colour in the painting. In Rossetti, Gordon Bottomley found the poet-painter, in Shannon he found a painter who aroused in him the mood of romance, and he wrote a series of poems, *White Nights*, in which he takes pictures of Shannon as his subjects. His appreciation of the romantic type of painter is caused by the fact that the world of painting and of poetry is very much the same to him. He does not conceive of

poetry and painting as being different mediums dealing with different materials. In looking at a picture it is possible to experience a peculiar emotional satisfaction which cannot be obtained from any other source, but for Gordon Bottomley both arts are different sides of the same coin, for to him they both bring into ordinary life the world of romance and legend, and both arts present visually, one in paint and the other in words, the objects the painter and poet sees in his mind. As a lyricist Gordon Bottomley is essentially a pictorial poet, and he is at his best when he uses this quality of his of making a picture. In such a poem as *The End of the World*, in which he describes the remoteness from ordinary human life of two lovers alone in a house surrounded by snow, he shows his remarkable gift for the pictorial, a gift for creating a picture not in bright flat colours but in subtle tones and shadows.

Gordon Bottomley's desire to write plays has always been combined with the wish to see them performed; he has never been the type of poet who writes plays merely for reading, without a thought of their ultimate production on the stage. He sees his pictures within his mind, he gives them form in his plays and he wishes to see his pictures come to life actually before people's eyes in the theatre. As a dramatist he is not interested primarily in plot or in character (if character is conceived of as a rounded entity) but he is interested in the dramatic picture that is written in his mind, and which he wishes to project into a play and ultimately upon the stage. "The life of these things is in action" is the text he prints before his important plays *Gruach* and *Britain's Daughter*, and in a certain sense this is true.

His connection with the stage, however, has always been slight, partly because he has spent the greater part of his life in seclusion in the districts of Cartmel and Silverdale near Morecambe Bay. He has not combined his poetic work with the directorship of a theatre, nor has he worked in partnership with a famous actor. For these reasons, in addition to the fact that they are written in verse, his plays have not been produced on the stage as frequently as their merit deserves.

Perhaps the fact that his plays are shorter than the ordinary play produced in a theatre has been another reason for their infrequent appearance on the stage. The play of his which has met with most success, *King Lear's Wife*, appeared at His Majesty's under the direction of Viola Tree, and was also performed by the Birmingham Repertory Company. *Gruach*, too, has been performed by repertory companies. On the whole, in England, Bottomley has had to depend chiefly on amateur organizations for the productions of his plays, since even repertory companies desire plays of standard length and standard qualities, except on the rare occasions when they are ready to risk their popularity in the production of something unusual. In America, however, where Gordon Bottomley has considerable renown as a poet and as a poetic dramatist, the conditions of theatrical production have been happier for him. Amateur acting societies exist on a much greater scale than in England; they are richer and their members have more leisure, also they frequently employ a paid producer of considerable ability, so that it is not unusual to find that these societies have a higher standard of acting than have professional companies in England. In addition to these there are "Little Theatres" in New York and other cities, which are experimental in a way in which English repertory companies, dependent for their very existence on retaining their popularity, can never be. It is for this reason that Gordon Bottomley has had opportunities in America which he has never had here, and has been able to gain a wider popularity there than in his own country.

The Crier by Night (1900) and *Midsummer Eve* (1902) are Gordon Bottomley's earliest plays, and plays in which he has not learned to use his dramatic medium fully, so that they are remarkable chiefly for their lyrical quality.

In *The Crier by Night* appears the type of woman which is found in nearly all his plays, the cruel and dominating woman, who finds a definite pleasure in the suffering and the death of others. The scene of the play is in remote ages past: Thorgerd, a Norse woman, has an Irish thrall, Blandid,

whom she ill-treats because she is jealous of the feeling of Hialti, her husband, towards her. Blandid bears the persecution of her mistress, because she feels that she herself is part of a supernatural legendary world which is more real than real life, and also because of her love for Hialti. The house in which they live is on the edge of the marsh, and in the marsh lives the Crier, who is a spirit who lures men to destruction in the lake. The old man cries out to Blandid to come with him, for

The end of sorrow is in sorrow's heart
With these who loved and knew the unknown end
Of mothering you a thousand years ago.

She consents to go, if he will lure Hialti to destruction so that she may secure him by dying the same death. The Crier takes Hialti and comes back for Blandid, but she is overcome with terror and clings to the feet of her enemy, Thorgerd, crying to her for help. Thorgerd remains remote from her and Blandid goes out into the night with the Crier.

The sadistic Thorgerd stands out as a clear and vivid figure, and there is an air of dread and mystery about the play, but the dramatic motive remains confused in the reader's mind. Blandid feels herself as a part of the supernatural world which the Crier represents, and she wishes to achieve some kind of mystical union with Hialti, but at the moment of crisis this is lost sight of and only her human fear remains. Gordon Bottomley at this stage had not found his poetic style, for he is still too much under the influence of some of the mannerisms of Rossetti, and still striving for the effect of the unusual in language. Blandid says:

My age-long cry droops in the hoar unseen stars that shake
Until their discordant rays make darkness inside the sky,
My bare cry shivers along the slimy rushes of the drowned lake.
Wearful waters, do you hear a soul's hair tingling your veiled feet
nigh?

The unnecessary compound words, the purposeless manufactured phrase such as "wearful," the artificial arrangement of the last line with its strained metaphor are signs

that Gordon Bottomley is still experimenting, not freely but as an imitator. Again, the kind of metaphor used is frequently not a dramatic one. Hialti speaks of tears:

Under each dark grey lash a long tear slid,
Like rain in a wild rose's shadowy curve,
Bowed in the wind about the morning twilight.

The simile is short here and that is all to the good, but similes are essentially unsuitable kinds of images for drama. In this simile, as in nearly all others, the mind is forced to form two pictures completely separate from each other in consecutive moments of time. First of all one sees the eyes with the tears descending, and then following that a quite separate picture of the rose bowing its head in the wind of the early morning. The dramatic image must be inseparable from the idea it expresses; idea and image must rush up together into our minds in bud and there flower together simultaneously. The image in question is not a happy one pictorially, and its existence in the drama shows that Gordon Bottomley at this stage is thinking more of the picture in his mind than of the one he wishes to project upon the stage.

Gordon Bottomley's second play, *Midsummer Eve*, is the least dramatic of his plays, and it gives one the impression that it suffers from the fact that it is a play and that therefore action must be introduced. It is really a poem concerned with the subject of summer and the effect of the rich ripening season on the minds of young dairy girls. It is a picture of the night at the height of summer time when the year is at the turn between spring and winter, as between life and death, and into his play Bottomley introduces meditative passages of considerable beauty on birth and upon the relationship of death to life. The plot is very simple and leads up to this subject. Some dairy-maids desire to see the shadows of their future husbands, and they go out into the night to look for them. Instead of their shadows they see the "fetch" of one of their number, Nan, and they think that it may be the herald of her death. This leads to a discussion

amongst the girls about the strangeness and the value of life, and death and birth. The mood of meditation is broken in upon by the sudden appearance of the "fetch" and the play ends suddenly with the death of Nan. The whole meaning of the play is in its brooding meditative atmosphere, the state of trance brought about by the luxuriance of summer, by the hovering for a moment between the two seasons of birth and decay; and the mood is broken in upon by the fact that the "fetch" ceases to be an excuse for the spoken contemplation of life and death, and becomes instead a melodramatic incident. Gordon Bottomley at this stage is like many writers of modern drama, attracted by the supernatural and unsure what to do with it, and what its place in drama can and cannot be. The supernatural cannot in these days be merely an incident, a dramatic device, it must in fact be a felt truth of the inner life, as it is with Yeats, not a fantasy of the mind. The ending shatters the ornate atmospheric structure of the play, although dramatically it is necessary so that it may be called a play. In spite of the end, the play breathes forth colour and warmth, although Gordon Bottomley has not found his own style. The artificial compounds and the strange words still appear.

He turned the cows at the midden-yard loaning
The loitering cows in the brown owl-tide

The evening is "dusked," and the cows' udders are "crusht shagged thighs between."

Up to this stage Gordon Bottomley has a debt chiefly to literature in forming his poetic style, but in the later plays (especially *Riding to Luthend*, *King Lear's Wife* and *Gruach*) he gets his stimulus to the creation of his plays from definite legends as well as from literature. In his two early plays and in his sadistic drama, *Laodice and Danae*, there is a certain thinness and vagueness, a lack of vitality. *The Crier by Night* and *Midsummer Eve*, which are more individually distinctive than the *Laodice* play, leave one with the feeling that one is sinking into moss, or being sucked down into a bog of luxuriant feeling. Gordon Bottomley needs the stimulus of

other minds than his own, whether the stimulus is to come from a picture, from literature or from ancient legend. To Yeats, legend and even the picture and poem of another is only another gateway into the tangled growth of his own mind, with its never ending pathways leading into the distance. To Gordon Bottomley legend and story woven in literature present a new world of splendour, and give to him something which in himself is lacking. They lift his mind from the abstract meditations of the *Hymn to Touch* and *Hymn to Form*, from the vague luxuriance of feeling and expression of his early plays, and give to him what he needs—a new source of vitality.

The Riding to Luthend is a play written about the epic subject of the Northern heroine, Hallgerd, the devouring woman, who thirsts for the sight of battle and of her husband dying in defence of his house. There is the spirit of an old saga in the battle scene where the hero Gunnar calls for a lock of Hallgerd's hair with which to mend his bow, and when she refuses resigns himself to fate:

Let be—

She goes her heart's way, and I go to earth.

In this play under the influence of heroic sagas there is a new tense line, and the old luxuriance of description no longer finds a place.

It is Shakespeare, however, who was to stimulate Gordon Bottomley, not to imitation, but to a new conception of subject and to a new style. In *King Lear's Wife* he is treating a full-sized subject, and viewing it clearly as an object within sight of his own eyes. The people in *The Crier by Night* are far off shadowy figures groping their way in the Celtic twilight; the people in *Midsummer Eve* are seen in the mist of summer drowsily, while the men and women in *Riding to Luthend* are in the heroic formal attitude of people in a frieze. In *King Lear's Wife* the characters are no longer seen isolated from a distance, for the play is the disclosure of the relationship of four people shown in painful intimacy. The subject of the play is cruelty, and the method of presentation is arresting and, at the end of the play, violently startling in effect.

Gordon Bottomley takes as his subject the early history of King Lear and of Goneril: he builds up his picture of their lives entirely from his imagination, contemplating their character and relationship as found in Shakespeare's play, and giving to them a history which is reconcilable with the Lear and Goneril of Shakespeare's play. In the play, Hygd, the wife of Lear, a woman of middle age, is dying, and is dying not so much from disease as from distaste for life and from resentment against Lear's neglect. King Lear has little care for her, and is absorbed in his passion for Gormflaith, her beautiful maid, a sensual and ambitious girl. Hygd lies neglected while Gormflaith persuades Lear to let her try on the queen's crown. Goneril returns from hunting, and from her mother's dying words she understands the situation. She murders Gormflaith and defies her father, who, when he finds that his mistress was treacherous to him, accepts his daughter's condemnation in bewilderment. The play ends with a scene in which women prepare the body of the queen for burial.

Goneril is shown as the follower of Diana's cult of cruel virginity, untouched by tender emotion, unawakened as yet to the possibilities of her own nature. She tells her mother of the holy religious joy that she finds in hunting in the dawn, in the clean killing of animals in flight. She feels something approaching tender feeling for her dying mother, but it is spasmodic and is more of the nature of remorse for the fact that her love is not great. Her rage with Lear for taking Gormflaith as his mistress arises partly because she feels it as an insult that her mother—the being who produced her—should be scorned. she does not feel this resentment because Hygd is a loved object to her. As Gormflaith says:

And though we know so well—she and I, O we know—
That she could love no mother nor partake in anguish,
Yet she is flouted when the king forsakes her dam,
She must protect her very flesh, her tenderer flesh.

It is in the murder of Gormflaith that she comes to maturity and realizes what life may mean to her. Her fear of her father and her love for him goes as she sees that the divine wisdom

of the king is not with him. Her scorn for man increases and she sees her future life as a cleansing, killing force:

A little blood is lightly washed away,
A common stain that need not be remembered,
And a hot spasm of rightness quickly born
Can guide me to kill justly and shall guide.

The mother, Hygd, is like Goneril in her cold resentment, although she is weakened by the force of life; she is still untamed by the yoke of man that she feels about her neck, and she speaks to Goneril of the quick passing of women's fertility, and of the seeking of one object after another by the potent male.

We are good human currency, like gold,
For men to pass among them when they choose

Lear himself is tortured by life as Hygd is. He speaks bitterly of Hygd as he gazes at her lying dead:

She had a bloodless beauty that cheated me.
She was not born for wedlock. She shut me out
She is no colder now.

He takes the ill-bred beautiful Gormflaith, but he despises her for her "menial fingering and servile thought," when she takes the queen's crown, and he loathes her for infidelity to him when he discovers it after she is murdered. The final scene in which the queen's body-washers quarrel for money, insult the body and sing ribald songs is violently unpleasant. But the remoteness of the queen's deathbed from human love, the stress on bodily decay, the whole tone of the scene merely intensifies the predominant impression of the rest of the play. The emotions of Hygd, Lear, Goneril and Gormflaith are painfully concentrated within a narrow compass upon each other, but love has no place—only hatred, suspicion, desire and (in Goneril and Hygd) a cruel desire for purity. Hygd and Lear alike are trapped by life, and hence the loneliness of death and decay is felt throughout the play and supremely at its ending.

Gordon Bottomley found new sources of life in Shake-

speare; he gained the power of creating a situation in which different personalities express themselves and are shown bound cruelly by life and by themselves. Yet his dramatic skill is still predominantly pictorial. When we think of *King Lear's Wife* after reading it we see it as a series of clear, vivid pictures. We see Hygd lying in bed in danger of death and the old doctor asking for the king's precious emerald and see Lear replying:

Shatter my emerald!
Only the fungused brain and carious mouth
Of servile things could shape such thought.
My emerald!

We see Gormflaith taking the crown from near the queen's bed, and Hygd dragging herself across the room to watch the lovers. We see Goneril forcing Gormflaith back into an inner room at the point of her dagger, and lastly we see the dead body of the queen in the hands of her malignant, callous body-washers. These scenes stand out in our minds because there is no background, no sense of continuous life flowing behind the people—life which flows over people and then recedes, and then flows over them again. The people in the play are shown in one particular moment where the conflict is most intense, and it is the colour and form of this piece of life that he wishes to show.

The imagery and the diction is more dramatically conceived than that in Gordon Bottomley's earlier plays. The outline of the play is hard, cold and clear, and we find no vague luxuriant phrase in the course of the play. The language is direct, and imagery and elaboration appear but seldom. One long descriptive passage there is in which Goneril describes her awakening from sleep by the baying of hounds and her following them up to the top of the mountains at the sunrise.

I dreamt that I was swimming shoulder up,
And drave the bed-clothes spreading to the floor.
Coldness awoke me through the waning darkness
I heard far hounds give shivering acry tongue,

Remote, withdrawing, suddenly faint and near. . . .

I lost them

Before I stept with the first tips of light,
On Raven Crag near by the Druid Stones;
So I paused there, and, stooping, pressed my hand
Against the stony bed of the clear stream,
Then entered I the circle and raised up
My shining hand in cold stern adoration
Even as the first gleam went up the sky.

Goneril's story of her holy joy in hunting, her purification of herself in the cold light of morning by the sudden killing of her prey is intended dramatically to be the key to her character. Yet the passage is complete in itself in its effect and can be detached from the play, and still be understood and felt. It is not, that is to say, a purely dramatic image, whose very essence is changed by being torn away from its surroundings. The description gains its effect by purely pictorial means, for as we read Goneril's speech we receive within our own minds a clear pictorial image. So much is this true that we tend to see Goneril raising her hands in "cold stern adoration even as the first great gleam went up the sky," as something in a picture or as a statue, rather than as an individual, surrounded by life, emerging from the mass of life into our imaginative vision. The image of Goneril is masterly in its own way, and impresses the mind with its power, but the first impression of it is the best one, and re-reading does not disclose new riches as time goes on, for the beauty is of a hard and brilliant surface and no more.

As an expression of a mood, an attitude to life, the play excels, but it bows the mind down painfully before a group of imprisoned people. There is no sense of relief with the tragedy, no leaping up of the mind into space, even though it may be a black space. This feeling of release can come in different ways with different authors; in poetic drama it sometimes comes with an identification of the people in the drama with nature, so that what the mind of the spectator contemplates is not the unbearable conflict of mankind

separated from its background. Release also comes with imagery which is not merely pictorial but which expresses a depth of emotional life. In *Gruach* and *Britain's Daughter* the effect aimed at is different in kind from that in *King Lear's Daughter*, and it is largely by the identification of his people with nature and by the use of a different kind of imagery that Gordon Bottomley avoids its painful conflict.

The subject of *Gruach* is suggested by Macbeth, and Gordon Bottomley attempts to build up the early life of Lady Macbeth in such a way that it is consistent with her character in Shakespeare's play. He is still attracted by the same kind of heroine, for Gruach is ruthless and ferocious, but she is a richer, more mature personality than Goneril. Gordon Bottomley pictures her as being confined by an enemy family to a "small black stone castle" in the north of Scotland. She is to be married to Conan, an insignificant man, son to the grudging, scolding Morag. Gruach, before the arrival of the Envoy, Macbeth, longs for freedom from the intolerable life of the castle, though she knows nothing else. The first sight of the Envoy sets her free. She stands on the stairs in her white and golden gown, recognizing him as her release, and offers him her bridal chamber for the night. The centre of the play is the love scene between Gruach and the Envoy, and for Gordon Bottomley's conception of the psychology of Gruach, as well as for her connection with the Lady Macbeth of Shakespeare, it is necessary that she should walk in her sleep in the scene. For to Gordon Bottomley, Gruach is an ambitious girl, undeveloped, shut-in, since there is nothing in the barren brutal life of the castle to awaken her. The sight of the Envoy in the hall has stirred her, and unconsciously she has made her submission. The Envoy himself, lying alone in the hall, is prepared for her coming:

I watched becalmed on a dark tide of sleep
That has no murmurs; yet when its small motion
Withdraws me from myself I hear each time
A voice that has no substance.

In her sleep Gruach gives herself to him gladly:

I would fain pour out my being over you
Like faint moonlight that is yet universal
And enfolds kings and their kingdoms.
Will you take me? will you not?

She cries to him to free her, and he summons her back to real life:

Falter no more in the dim passages
That in the outer walls of life's house burrow
And endlessly return upon themselves
Awake and with me dare Awake! Awake!

When she awakes, the fierce bitter side of her, the part of her that will be won by no man, is dominant, and she greets the Envoy as a robber and tries to kill him with her dagger. The mood is overcome and she is ready to give up herself:

You are my redeemer, you shall have my faith;
Service, and I can serve you with men's truth . .

Yet she is divided between that mood and the mood of domination. It is she who plans their escape, insists on his abandoning his trusted horse, forces him to break the king's seal so that she may have paper on which to write her defiant message, and finally makes him swear that when he returns he will raze the castle to the ground.

The theme in the scene which gives unity to these conflicting elements and which gives a sense of freedom to the mind is that of the snow which encloses the lovers within the secret inner world and gives to them as human beings a spacious and dazzling background. The Envoy sees the snow as the work of fate forbidding their escape:

Snow there is snow.
O tranquil, dreadful calm, O deadly peace
We are shut back into the cast-off life
By pale, relentless, softly closing gates
That no man ever opened

Gruach sees the snow as the symbol of the veil of her virginity which is to be torn apart giving her entrance to life:

O, joyful silence, soundlessly dropping curtains
About the secret chambers of the earth
That shall contain our bridal bed. O, sleep,
The bride's white hush is in me; I will part
The soundless curtains, and meet what is within—
Either continuing sleep, that can withdraw me
From this dead life with love my latest hope,
Or, delicate, wildering waking in some pale room
To find my love with me.

In *The End of the World* Gordon Bottomley created a world for his lovers of an isolated and intensified life, and in *Gruach* he achieves again the identification of the inner life of his lovers with that of nature.

The play *Gruach* has a deeper, more imaginative emotional content than has *King Lear's Wife*, yet it is predominantly pictorial. Gordon Bottomley sees all his plays not as something in his own mind, but as something projected out into space. It is not that he sees every incident in terms of the stage, as do some dramatists bred in the theatre, but he sees each individual situation projected into space as a visualist does. When we think of *Gruach* we ourselves see the play pictorially. There is the entrance of *Gruach* with her tangle of spring flowers spilling over her dress, her appearance in her gold wedding dress in the torchlight of the hall, her picking up of the fated nightshade flower and her struggle with Fern for it, her sleep-walking with her golden hair spread out in the glow of the fire, her wrestling with her lover, her flight from the hall into the snow. Such distinct and separate pictures seldom come from the work of a dramatist who is writing primarily for the theatre with the knowledge of the theatre's requirements, and this peculiar pictorial pattern is more effective in reading than on the stage. Pictorial beauty in literature is attractive very largely because of the numbers of associations that it calls up from the stores of the mind's past. *Gruach* arouses the romantic associations of ladies standing on staircases painted in the late nineteenth century, of illustrations of tales of romance, of the portrait of Ellen Terry as Lady Macbeth, of the

gloomy romance of Scottish hill country, of the cruelty and storm of Wuthering Heights. All poetry makes its impression on the mind very largely by means of the associations that it arouses. But if we look into our minds as we read such a poem as Keats's *Ode to the Nightingale* or Blake's *Sunflower*, we find that the associations aroused by the imagery are not obvious or rational in their appearance. Feelings and ideas crowd into the mind, elbowing each other, retreating and advancing, mingling together and dissolving from view. There is a difference between the straightforward kind of poetry which calls out direct associations of romance, literary and pictorial, and the kind of subtle poetry which creates in the unconscious mind a harmony which can be analysed only in part.

Gruach as a play gives an impression of beauty, of golden light against blackness, but it remains as a series of pictures rather than as a representation of life plucked by art from the vast darkness of life.

The imagery of *Gruach* is not coldly and barely pictorial as that of *King Lear's Daughter*. Instead we find a kind of imagery which is much more in the Shakespearean tradition, the imagery which does not build up a clearly limited and defined picture, but which gains its effect by awakening associations, so that the thing started is only the starting point for a journey back into our minds. This is *Gruach's* curse on the castle of her enemies:

It shall go down, or like a broken tree
Whiten and crumble to a hollow bone,
The moon shall soften it to a cowering dread,
And shapeless noises shall inhabit it.

In her curse there is no direct statement of facts, no single defined picture, but instead there is the building up of a feeling of horror by the suggestion of objects of ruined melancholy and decay, the broken dying tree, the crumbling human bone, the haunted castle. Gordon Bottomley has also learned to use his images dramatically, so that they are not only of beauty in themselves, but also a part of the woven

texture of the play. We need a knowledge of the play itself to experience fully the image in the Envoy's call to Gruach:

Falter no more in the dim passages
That in the outer walls of life's house burrow
And endlessly return upon themselves
Awake and with me dare. Awake! Awake!

Britain's Daughter, published in the same volume as *Gruach*, is like it in that Gordon Bottomley has again taken as his subject one full of colours and of dramatic pictures, and one also in which nature is the background. Britain's Daughter is a princess, daughter of a cruel tyrant-queen of Britain. Her mother and sister have been killed by the Romans, and she is beaten and tied to a post by the soldiers. She is reviled by her people as one of a tyrant's race, but she remains steadfast and refuses the offer of safety from a Roman general. Exile to her is worse than death:

O my earth,
I have grown up from you like a still tree,
In soaring contemplation looking down,
At one with you by sap and breath, stirred thoughts
And when my root is cut I shall not live.

At the end of the night she, with other Britons, is torn away from her own countryside, which she feels to be a part of her, and a picture of the embarking, of parting, agony, sorrow, confusion looms up before us, and sinks away from us with the night as the boat sails away.

Full-sized poetic plays have little chance of being presented frequently upon the stage, and for this reason Gordon Bottomley's last volume, *Scenes and Plays* (1929), consists of a series of short plays which could be performed by amateurs or professionals on a platform without scenery and with the simplest of stage accessories. In a note to the volume Gordon Bottomley speaks of the Nō plays and of the plays of Yeats and Sturge Moore. Some of the plays, however, included in the volume have no relationship to such plays, and they are intended as material for the English and

Scotch Verse-Speaking Association. These plays—*The Parting*, *The Return*, *The Widow*, *The Sisters*, make no use of the chorus in any form and only one of them, *The Return*, which has as its hero Thomas of Ercildown, is romantic in subject.

The Parting is a beautiful and reticent piece of writing, beautiful not only in reading but as presented on the stage, though its qualities call more for speaking than for acting. There are only two characters, the mother and the daughter; the mother, suffering from some mortal illness, sends her daughter away to a far-off country to meet her lover and to marry him. The revelation comes slowly to the daughter that when she is gone the mother will die from her illness in loneliness. She wishes to sacrifice herself, but the mother tells her why she must go in quiet, anguished tones:

You will not make me grieve,
As for a year I have done, watching you
Using on me exquisite, unconscious
Delicacies of thought and manner and face
That should be seen and felt in other places
To bring you cherishing in youth and age!
And when your far-off friend would be your lover
And called to you, I knew that you must go.
And more and more I knew that I must send you.

Gordon Bottomley keeps the scene in a quiet tone, he is not seeking to display the horror of illness and of loneliness. He wants only to give the feeling tone of the woman's life, the calmness, the restraint, the sad relinquishment of all life's joys which we hear in her farewell to her daughter after she has gone:

Dawn is not yet The night is long, the morning
Hides what it holds So does another morning—
Or will it be another night like this
That is going on for ever in this heart?
She crosses the moonlight now between the houses.
Now she turns the corner. and is gone.
Perhaps she is late and will return .
That is the train at the crossing she has time.
She will return no more.

In *Towie Castle* and *Merlin's Grave* Gordon Bottomley uses Yeats's device of curtain bearers and folders who speak one by one. Speaking choruses of a number of women are rarely pleasing in effect, partly because of the air of artificiality which their speech is apt to have, partly because the difficulty of hearing the separate words is great. Although the quality of the verse-speaking of the Scottish Verse Speaking Association is admirable, Gordon Bottomley's chorus, as represented by them on the occasion of the performance of the play, made an unsatisfactory impression. In *The Singing Sands* the verse which the chorus recites contains many sibilants intended to represent the noise of the waves. This increases the feeling of artificiality. Gordon Bottomley's conception of the function of the chorus is totally different from that of the writers of the Nō drama or of Yeats. *The Singing Sands* relates an incident in which a boatman takes a young city woman, whose father has hired him for a period, to some islands. He is in love with her and nearly persuades her to love him, when he meets the spirit of a woman who has been put to death by one of his ancestors, because she nobly preferred death to desertion of her family. The spirit wins his love and the two human beings cast romance away from them. The chorus of waves helps to give the setting, but it gives the impression that it is tacked on to the main story. The chorus is intended to bind together the two separate stories—that of the death of the island maiden and that of the love of the Boatman for Miss Helen. The task, however, is too difficult.

One is uneasily reminded by the Boatman of Barrie's romanticized ghillies, of the stage Scotchmen, all nature's gentlemen, consumed with a desire for learning; Miss Helen remains wooden and the separation from the ghost world remains. This is partly because the chorus in this play is really a trimming, a frill, not a vital part of it. In the Nō drama, and in that of Yeats, the chorus is something inside and outside the mind, for it can describe and yet speak for any character. If the chorus is to be of this nature, and a part of the vital tissue of the play, it must be without personality and without the trappings of romanticism.

In the play, *Ardvorlich's Wife*, where the multiple chorus is used again, Gordon Bottomley comes much closer to the spirit of the Nō plays. The Strange Woman, Ardvorlich's wife, has been frightened away into the mountains by some enemies of her family who have placed her brother's head before her eyes, when she received them as guests at a meal. She has lived alone as a wild woman, with all memory lost of her former life, and when the play opens she is about to give birth to a baby. After the baby's birth her husband finds her and she remembers him, and returns to ordinary life. The chorus of eight women represents the snow, and they not only relate events, but share the feelings of the woman's mind. They are thinking of the act of creation as she is:

Hither and thither darts
 Another, a feather, a petal, a wing:
 And, as they fall and lie
 Close and closer and cling,
 A substance, a texture ensue,
 And being assemble—a new
 Being assembles, a thing
 Here unexpectedly——

They know that everyday life has lost its hold on the woman and that during her unconsciousness of it they, as the half conscious forces of nature, have gained her:

There's a wild woman apart,
 With no home but our bosom of whiteness
 She is alone, but not mute,
 She speaks to Nothing, a lightness
 Is in her mind and in her gaze
 Alarm like a lifting haze
 Fills her eyes, she is lost
 In her body, her spirit, and her ways.

It is the birth of the child which restores the woman to a human mind, and to her former life, and the chorus serves the dramatic purpose of describing the birth which releases the woman from the numbing, universal power of nature:

First Woman: There is something not yet done:
Hard yet not of sadness. . . .
What torment is hers and of the hour's?
The snow everywhere grieves
With her, there might be rivers
Of nerves that branch and grow
Through the bosom of the snow. . . .
She has not changed her place,
Yet she is rent and is two
Move quietly. Let her alone.
She is again her own.
All: She is not for the snow.

The husband appears and takes back his own, the woman loses her immortal inhuman part, and the snow women return to their unconscious life, unsullied by human cares:

In remembrance we have no skill
Cloudy flakes and snow
Cover our minds below
New snow.

It is the theme of snow once more which arouses Gordon Bottomley's poetic powers, but on the whole the form of the Nō drama, so successfully modified by Yeats, is not accepted by him. In *Ardvorlich's Wife* unity of feeling is given by the snow chorus, and the Strange Woman and the Snow Women are not separate people poetically, but one. But even in this play the coming of the husband and the scene of ordinary life strains the texture of the play. The realistic portrayal of human tenderness can have little place in the non-representational play. The direct representation of tenderness, or of any other emotion, causes the glass of meditation to be broken, and in the Scenes and Plays of romantic subject the glass lies shattered at our feet.

In this volume Gordon Bottomley introduces too many obviously attractive incidents—the romantic boatman, the ancient legend and its ghost, the hissing waves of *The Singing Sands*, the pathos of the Edom O'Gordon ballad, the remorse of Adam Gordon and the forgiveness of the child in *Towie*

Castle. His *Lyric Plays* of 1932 are written round the theme of Scotch legends, and they all use singing choruses as part of their technique. The superficial attractiveness of these legends is great, it causes an immediate appeal by its own nature and in that appeal lies the danger to the artist. There is an insidious charm in the melancholy and fierce ardour of these legends that arouses immediate emotion from the audience and from the reader. It is difficult for the author dealing with these legends not to exploit their charm, and not to let himself be so affected by it that the legends flow through him to his audience, not re-created and turned into vital form, but merely filtered through the personality of the author.

The most successful of these plays is *Marsaili's Weeping*, where Gordon Bottomley is creating savagely heroic figures. Macaintoisich brings revenge upon Marsaili for her scorn of him by killing her children before her eyes, but even then she will not give him relief by showing her grief. Later in her agony she curses her parents for giving him help in his pursuit of her with the words:

I can only pray for destruction to take your all—
As destruction has taken mine

There the play should end, but tragedy usually ends on a minor note, so that the spectator may be reconciled to life again, and in addition Bottomley has his philosophy to express. So Macaintoisich and Marsaili meet again in old age and there is a partial reconciliation, which though written with delicacy sentimentalizes the story and softens and blurs the life in the poem, the hard, taut vitality by which it lives. The soft melancholy of *Kirconnel Lea* where the dead live their dream-like life in the part of earth which terrible emotion has made their own loses its spell over us as we hear Helen tell her lovers that passion and enmity are not felt by the "children of eternity" beside the "still waters."

The "Scene" does not readily lend itself to the expression of a philosophy of life which may be found implicit in the longer play; it lives as it expresses the mood, the emotional tone of a scene or of a life. There must be complete emotional

integrity, and the unity of the poet's mood must be communicated to the audience. In the Nō form of drama and in the *Four Plays* of Yeats the mind is not startled by bright and various colours, for the artist subdues them to one pattern and to one tone.

Gordon Bottomley's "Scenes" and "Lyric Plays" are an interesting development of his art, but the longer and more English form of drama suits him better, because there is more space for the pictorially romantic qualities which attract him.

CHAPTER XII

STURGE MOORE

STURGE MOORE, like so many artists of his time, was deeply influenced by the work and personality of Shannon and Ricketts when he first published his work in the early years of this century. His lengthy and diffuse poetic drama, *Absalom*, his descriptive poem, *Danae*, are embodiments of the romantic conception of poetry as the close sister of painting, portraying in words the sensuous elements in a scene which the descriptive painter also seeks to represent. His interest is in the static or in the statuesque movement of the Spenserean world so that in *Absalom* the narrative uncoils itself slowly and at length, while in the pictured *Danae*, revised in 1920, the effect aimed at is that of the creation of a brilliantly lit, many-sided sparkling object, and therefore the movement of the poem is deliberately held up and returns upon itself.

The mind and the poetic nature of Sturge Moore are wide and deep, and although his admiration for Shannon and Ricketts was lifelong, in the group of poetic drama published between 1920 and 1930 he is freed from the bonds of any one tradition in art and he is writing at the full height of his power.

In his critical work of 1929, *Armour for Aphrodite*, in which he considers the æsthetic basis for poetry, Sturge Moore speaks of his method of writing. He says that the idea for a long poem arrives and that the poet broods over it for weeks, for months and even for years, allowing subsidiary notions to flock round the main one. While the poem is in this state, "a wise poet will reject all suggestions of rhythm and phrasing." He knows that they would "crystal-

lize the fruit before it is ripe," before the poet has lived long enough with his idea. This "holding-back" process Sturge Moore regards as most important for the poet and says: "Woe betide, if felicitous verses appear before the fundamental beauties of his theme stand round him like mountains of necessity." This stage of waiting, of meditation is a necessity, for "Every element must count in the total effect of an organic whole, every implication; a great beauty is always a highly organized whole."

It is this sense of wholeness, of unity, of deep meditation given a perfectly harmonious poetic form that we find in Sturge Moore's poetic dramas, and above all in his "Mystery" of 1930, *Psyche in Hades*. Sturge Moore clearly wrote *Psyche in Hades* with Milton's *Comus* in mind, and, as in *Comus*, the people are distanced so that one can concentrate on the central theme of the mystery. *Comus* was written to express the moral idea of Chastity, but chastity was for Milton more than a single idealized quality; it was an ideal of life. *Psyche in Hades* embodies a poetic idea of the wholeness of life, but in the relationship of Psyche and her mother, Persephone, in the flowing and ebbing of Psyche's feeling of love towards her lost lover, Eros, there is a dramatic poetic form given to the struggle for love within the mind of the individual. Psyche does not possess an individuality in the sense that she would if she were a heroine in a realistic play, but she is more individual than the Lady in *Comus*, since love is more personal than the colder abstraction of chastity and purity. Sturge Moore puts into the play the romantic setting of Persephone's dwelling place in Hades, and he has to take into account all the romantic associations in our minds which play round the flower-giving Persephone, her capture by Dis, and her brief reappearance on earth; and those around the tragic love of Eros and of Psyche, her disobeying of the commands of Eros to love him only in darkness, and her flight through the world because of his anger. Sturge Moore avoids the possibility of calling up associations of a sentimental banality by preserving a certain formal quality throughout the play. Curtain bearers and folders are

used to announce a change in scene, and they indulge in no luxuriant description but begin:

Be kind, and picture, what we cannot show,
That House where mighty Dis dwells down below.

Psyche, Persephone, Anteros and the Ministrant Shades wear masks, Psyche's being "white and of an extreme purity of outline," Persephone's is "sunburnt and profoundly stilled by thought and patience," while Anteros is "black with gold hair and eyes filmed with violet." Also the formality of the characters is increased by their dress, which is designed after the patterns on Greek vases, a nearly life-sized female being embroidered on the back as on the front of Psyche's dress, while on the dress of Persephone there is a picture of a "maiden clad from neck to ankle in daffodil smock, carrying a mass of purple and white crocuses in the lap of her skirt, with a couple held in her right hand." These masks and dresses are used to call up the associations from Greek legend that Sturge Moore needs, and to avoid the lush romanticism of modern renderings of Persephone's longing for earth, or the sentimental yearnings of Lord Leighton's classical figures.

The Ministrant Shade greets Psyche's appearance with a formal note:

How cam'st thou here? and why?
Psyche Ah! since in 'Why' sound still is shaped in vain,
 'How' falls as dolefully as endless rain

The riddle-like effect of speech appears frequently in the poem, and, at times, when it is obscure, it is somewhat annoying, but it does serve the purpose of distancing the legend and lessening its easy obvious appeal, as it also emphasizes the fact that the whole play is a kind of moral riddle, a complete poetic and philosophic idea.

Psyche comes to Hades because she has been told by Pan that Persephone is her mother. Eros has been Psyche's lover, but urged by her sisters, who through jealousy have told her that he was a dragon, she has lit a lamp and looked at him and he has fled in anger. Psyche reveals her parentage to

the Ministrant Shades while Persephone is listening unseen. After their first greeting the mother and daughter withdraw and the Shades tell the history of Persephone and of her leaving her baby on earth with a queen. The mother and daughter are then seen again, after the folding of a curtain, but we are not asked to indulge our sympathies in an easy emotional situation of the reconciliation of long parted mother and daughter, since if the purely human relationship of these two were fully stressed the symbolic truth of the Greek legend and of Sturge Moore's interpretation of it would be submerged. Instead we are taken to the Queen's bower and there made acquainted

With caverns in the heart as vast and strange
As any foot-sore Psyche e'er could range

We are to experience, not the individual experience of the mythical Psyche, or the modern humanized version of her but the mystery of human life as shown in the development of love in the mind of woman. The problem of Psyche, emotionally, is the discontinuity of life. Eros has won and possessed her only at night in darkness, and she has had only part of him and he part of her. Psyche feels this as symbolical of the fact that in life there is no continuity of personality, for the present is separate from the past, and from the future, and if none of these is the real, what is the real? As she says:

Mine *unknown* writhes away mile beyond mile,
Year behind year only this *known* can smile
And momentarily fondle and toy
While it forgets that surmise python-shaped
From whose invisible it has escaped.
Horror in horror linked drags behind joy
And forward from it through unrealized night
Events to freeze blood and kill tender sight.

The dragon is the poet's picture of the Eros of legend as the image of life. There is joy in the passing moment, but the terror of the tragedy of the past and the horror of the future is like a linked dragon of which the present is the

central part. The moments of time are seen also as drops of rain:

No sooner formed than cast
Dizzily downward through the fathomless past:

The heart is sickened by the perpetual feeling of the inconstancy of things, by the impossibility of seizing on the "Now," without feeling the sinister shade of the past or of the future:

And, as things seen, those tasted, touched, or heard,
Vanish for ever in change, till our hearts' faith
Fly to this maze of webs, be caught by death.

A messenger comes with news that Eros seeks Psyche everywhere and that she is to be made immortal, and after this comes Anteros, his "eyes filmed with violet, wrists bound by a violet kerchief, wearing sullen blood-colour." Anteros is not Eros but the feeling warring against love in Psyche's mind, and in that of man and woman. He is used dramatically by Sturge Moore and is not merely a dummy figure preaching a doctrine, as are the Brothers in *Comus*. He is part of Psyche's mind and part of that of Persephone: when Psyche doubts in love and in life he comes nearer, and despair wins in her mind. When Persephone rejects doubt he disappears and goes farther off until she doubts again and then Psyche grows fainter in love. Anteros speaks of himself:

An impulse fish-like frozen fast in thought,
Kindness way-lost, high passion come to naught,
Leave Beauty's shadow draped about a stone

For me no night, no sleep, no dream, no kiss,
No trance, no death, no waking to new bliss,
. . . Mine are the cold, the hard, the numb, the lorn
Whose blush in time-to-come waits, never born. . . .

He is negation and sterility itself, and that mistrust of the moment of time which is so painfully linked to past and future that joy cannot live. Persephone gives to Psyche her comfort, the poetic principle of life which is the centre of Sturge

Moore's mystery, profoundly felt and experienced by him:

So in the depth of days, Memory's brush
Compasses with bold sweep and quivering flush
Envelope for bliss, teen, courtship and strife—
Contours to round ill-savoured with hale life:
So paints a figure whose proportions rare
Are grandly more significant than were
Brief single ecstasies of child, bride, mother,
Since each, paired with its pain, becomes quite other

The soul becomes finally wise and is a

Match for life's grim and ogre mysteries . . .
Adequate to the universe . . . at home
In that vast maze through which she used to roam
Utterly lost, hopeless, undone . .

But Anteros still remains and Psyche, still despairing, cannot believe that the evil of the past can ever be forgotten in the present, for:

Yet many a mortal ends a shapeless ghost; . . .
How can the whole which they have been out-weigh
The worst they have endured?

Persephone fears the future as Psyche fears the past, and she longs for the life of the Gods where the moment can stand alone in its full perfection without the terrifying memory of the past, without the horror of the unknown future:

Where last is first, where *now* discards alloy
With what once was, with what will or could be,
Hourless, eventless, mute with utter joy,
Instant as endless as eternity?

Finally the sense of the unity of life remains supreme with Persephone, and Psyche leaves her, undisturbed by doubts, to seek Eros.

In this play Sturge Moore uses the curtain bearers' device found in Yeats's plays, so that dramatic production can take place in an ordinary room without special scenery. *Medea*, one of the two plays in *Tragic Mothers* (1930), was written

in a modified form of the Nō drama used by Yeats, and the play was written at the direct request of Yeats. No musicians are used, but curtain bearers give a formal introduction to the subject by their chanting of the belief in Greece in spirits living after death and wandering the earth. The curtain bearers start to explain the past life of Medea to the folders, but when their heads are wimpled with grey lawn they are possessed by the spirits of Medea's dead sons, and they can speak no more except with the voices of the spirits. Sturge Moore's use of the Nō form of drama is completely original and free. As in *Psyche in Hades* he is dealing with a Greek legend, but though he wishes to re-create our conception of Medea, he does this by humanizing her rather than by distancing her, so that her symbolical quality may shine out. She is not the terrifying, malign, ill-used figure of Euripides, but the one-time votaress of Diana who has betrayed her trust and so become the victim of calamities at the hand of Jason and the unwilling murderess of her loved little boys.

It is Sturge Moore's achievement that he makes us see them through the eyes of Medea, not as murdered victims, but as shy playful little boys. Medea speaks to her companion, the wood nymph, Proto:

Medea Did you not hear that? then?

Proto Not the least sound

Medea I'm sure I heard my children shout at play,
Not far from here.

Proto I thought that they were dead?

Medea: Yes, yes, they are May not dead children play?

And later Medea says:

Yes, they must long for me as I for them.

Alive they were shy of strangers, you daunt them, you
Must quit me and they'll scamper to my arms

Medea is still the votary of Diana, won by Jason to her betrayal of her vows. The murder of the children was a kind of atonement to Diana, and after it she has been brought to live as a nymph in the forest, but she still craves for her lost

children. When Proto is sent into a trance the curtain bearer acts as a chorus representing that part of Medea's mind which is devoted to Diana. He reminds her:

Was not a life
In cool fast-rooted forest thy first dream?

He sinks into silence and she appeals to the boys to come and grant to her their forgiveness, but they are invisible and play hide and seek with her. She wants to weep over her past deeds and gain forgiveness from them; they want to play and have fun:

Medea: (incredulously) But are you really there?
You move about

Both Boys Yes, we are here, and run and leap and laugh.

Medea (kneeling on one knee, and holding out her arms)
Come, I have much to whisper, heart to heart.

Mermeros What a beautiful bow you've got.

Pheres: Bend it, mother.

Medea: I want your pardon, you can only give it
When you shall know how cruel were the wrongs. . . .

Both Boys Shoot, mother, shoot

The mother still speaks about forgiveness but the boys run away chasing a rabbit, and Medea dances to the expression of her thoughts, voiced by the curtain bearer. The children rejoice for now that they are spirits the forest creatures let them touch them. Medea appeals: "Stroke me," but when they reply "We do, but your skin does not tell you," she only feels a pang of grief. She dances to express her emotion until the curtain bearer utters her thought:

Glad-voiced, they flood
With joy the deep heart-springs,
But ignorant and young,
Speak but of trivial things

The boys ask her to play the game of shooting at them, and when she falters they say with the cruel logic of childhood:

Why mother,
If you could kill us with the knife we felt,
Surely you can loose the arrow we shan't feel at us!

Medea, in despair, calls on Nemesis to restore her boys to life, but they cry out with anguish, feeling the wounds again, and she revokes her prayer. The boys, before they go back to their graves at dawn, ask for two little image bows to play with, and Medea is left in her despair. The forest closes round her again, for

The beauty of the wilderness
Has most power when
'Tis temple for a heart's distress.

Sturge Moore's play, *Medea*, is a completely individual adaptation of the Nō form of drama. It transforms our conception of Medea, not by sentimentalizing over the legend, but by bringing her story into the intimacy of human life, by a beautiful representation of the little boys with their joy and play. Yet at the same time the play has its roots in the forest, for Medea is partly in the magic forest of Diana, and in the end the woods claim her.

Tyring, the other play published in *Tragic Mothers*, is not written in the Nō form, but deals directly with a single episode. Hervor, the warrior daughter of a Viking, Angantyr, comes to claim the magic, ill-fated sword from her dead father. Sturge Moore does not try to create romantic figures and atmosphere; his object is to create in us a mood, a deep-rooted feeling which is in us as in the Norse people, that the spirits of the mighty dead haunt the ancient barrows of the earth and dream through the triumphs of the past. Angantyr, because he has mutilated his wife, Tofa, in a moment's anger, is tied down by the memories of the past and by his remorse to the barrow, and there he is half suffocated by the damp melancholy of the tomb. Hervor comes to the barrow, set against the immense sky, the forest, the sad flats of low dunes, and summons her uncles from "the great gala plains of lights" of Valhalla, where they fight their spirit fights and rejoice. After their bright spirit-world the barrows seem terrible to them:

1st Voice: Damp stinking blindness, this is hell.

2nd Voice. What, am I caged in putrid bones?

3rd Voice. A clinging, rooty, mouldy smell
Is in my nose and I hear groans.

Hervor asks them to make her father give up the sword, and they express their scorn for real fighting after their combats of the spirit world, but Hervor arouses their memories and they burst into lyrical joy praising the flame of fire which is like that of the sword:

Watching their gold locks
Combed up from the logs
I too have envied
The intense activity
The up-rushing joy
Of Loki's energetic
And beautiful children.

When these spirits disappear the melancholy gloom deepens as darkness comes and Angantyr can be seen through the mound:

Like a felled oak-trunk green
with glimmering moss.

and:

as dimly

As in some black tarn a drowned man by starlight.

Angantyr prophesies that Hervor will be the mother of a mighty hero, but she will not give up the ill-fated sword. When she seizes it, her mother seizes it too, and in the struggle for it Tofa is wounded and dies, taking upon herself the curse of the sword. The spirits of the dead urge Hervor to take the sword, before they disappear with the coming of the dawn.

Tyrfing recaptures the spirit of the ancient Norse legend and embodies the deeply rooted feeling in us of the identification of the beings of the past with the earth around us, and it is more individually significant than Sturge Moore's two remaining dramas, *Roderigo of Brivar*, his Corneille-like drama, and his study in fierce ruthlessness, *Daimonessa*. But it is in *Psyche in Hades* and *Medea* that we find Sturge Moore's greatest achievements in poetic drama. Surface romantic drama has no attractions for the mature Sturge Moore, nor has he the method of writing which welcomes every association of beauty that can be gathered in from picture, story or life's experiences. He has a deep wholeness

of inner experience, a complete poetic life, into which he can plunge and take from its depths a harmonious, fully-felt, poetic experience. Intellect is of more importance to Sturge Moore than it is to Yeats, because he does not live emotionally in an unconscious symbolic world which is separate from the intellectual one. With Sturge Moore the life of the intellect is real in the same sense that the emotional unconscious life is, because for him the amalgamation of the two worlds is complete, while for Yeats his two worlds are in juxtaposition. With most poets their philosophy and conscious working with the life of ideas is a definite hindrance to them in their poetic experience and expression, because it remains as a hard centre which cannot fuse with its surroundings and we get the impression that the intellectual part has not been felt imaginatively.

Sturge Moore's professed method of refusing to allow the crystallising of his fruit before it is ripe, his way of living for lengthy periods with his subject, together with his vital interest in ideas has made him one of the few modern poets to achieve this imaginative fusion of feeling and thought.

CONCLUSION

THERE is great variety in the poetic drama of the twentieth century; it is not all cast in one mould, for the deadening tradition that all poetic drama must be romantic and genteel, or classical and ennobling has at last been cast away after two long centuries. Of the writers that we associate definitely with the 'nineties Phillips stands out as the faithful adherent of romance, famous historical themes, impassioned verse, the grand manner. His Bensonian stateliness of manner was modified by his flair for the theatrically successful, the display for display's sake, the swagger which Beerbohm Tree discovered in him and encouraged. Our fathers, as we do, felt the strain of living in a new age with new æsthetic and social doctrines threatening the very foundations on which they stood, and they turned with relief to Phillips, whom they felt to be safe, little knowing his divided heart, his tortured life which found expression only in his lyrics. Senex, and similar writers in the *Fortnightly Review*, turned to him with relief as a safe refuge from the dangerous æstheticism of the period: they felt him to be a second Tennyson, and even to-day a writer of an article in *The Poetry Review* praises him as a "Galahad" amongst the poets. His particular success was, however, soon outgrown, and he had few followers. The plays of Binyon remain as a monument to Phillips, but they serve to show how much out of sympathy the present age is with the nineteenth century's idea of romance, and to make us admire the more Phillips's real gift for stage-craft.

In addition to Phillips and Binyon we have as a heritage from the 'nineties, or at least from the way of thinking of that time, Hardy and Davidson. Hardy's most famous work, his novels, were written in the nineteenth century and not in

our own time, and *The Dynasts* itself belongs more to the 'nineties than to the twentieth century in its outlook. For those living in the late nineteenth century were more concerned than we are to-day about fundamentals, about the difficulty of fitting God into the universe, and the universe into God; they were more occupied with the search for a philosophy of life which would include the whole of life; and because of the power of religion which still exists with believer and unbeliever the problem of the salvation of the individual soul meant more to them. Davidson, too, denounced the doctrine of personal salvation from evil and damnation, but he wrestled with his soul all his life long, trying to cast from himself all humanitarian weakness—his substitute for sin and the devil. Failing finally to conquer the circumstances of life, he chose to leave it.

His dramas are a monument to this struggle; they are a magnificent assertion of the right of man to be omnipotent; they are doctrinal as are the writings of Hardy, as full of religion as the most serious jeremiads of the religious leaders of the day. Neither Hardy's nor Davidson's plays will lead the way for the drama of the future, for they are bound inextricably by the problems of their time, they are didactic first and last. Davidson seems more a part of our times than does Hardy, because of his insistence on the life of the instincts as opposed to that of the intellect, and because of the supreme place that he gives in his values to sexual life. But this insistence on the greater importance of one side of life is to some extent only a mode of the moment, and already Wyndham Lewis sounds his note of warning by the scorn he shows for what he calls the cult of the black man in Europe and America—the indiscriminating admiration for the life of feeling rather than for the life of thought. The Mammon plays are powerful works, and their value is not superficial but comes from the fire of life within Davidson; but the fire is volcanic and sporadic. He had strong emotions and the power of creating scenes giving symbolic form to these emotions, a symbolic form true for his readers as well as for himself. Apart from these scenes there is a

flat wide calm, and Davidson cannot create a play which is a harmonious world in itself.

Belonging to the æsthetic 'nineties, to the world of Wilde and Beardsley, writing beyond his time though with a beauty which does not date, we have Arthur Symonds, far from the crudities and violence of Davidson, and equally far from the intellectual questionings and the artistic deficiencies of Hardy. In its own way his *Tristan and Iseult* shows the way of perfection to the writers of symbolic drama with its subtle half-tones and muted notes, but for the English the writing of the Symbolists proper is only a side alley, unsuited to the peculiar qualities of the language and above all to the drama.

There remain the writers more definitely modern, rooted in our century rather than in the 'nineties. Amongst these there is the "back to nature" school, which avoids the romantic and the artificial in subject and in language, that of Gibson and Drinkwater. Drinkwater soon left the task of writing poetic drama, to which his complete lack of the power of visual imagery together with his pedestrian mind unfitted him; he turned to the more remunerative work of prose drama and journalistic biography. Gibson experimented sincerely in using the simplest material and the simplest technique in writing short poetic dramas about the life of the industrial and rustic worker. But sincerity in itself is not a saving grace, and there is something limitedly Edwardian in his studied simplicity. The drama of simplicity is like revived Morris dancing, amusing as a recreation but with no possibilities as a modern art form.

The most important contributions, æsthetically, to the poetic drama of this century have been made by Yeats and Sturge Moore. The world that Yeats creates in his plays is complete, self-contained, harmonious; his symbolism is not volcanic and violent, but vital to his being and to ours. The ancient legends of the race are not to him valuable for their picturesque qualities; the legendary figures are familiar and part of him, and their world is to him in harmony with his own inner imaginative life and therefore is made valuable to us. For the more adequate expression of this world he has

created a new form of drama, a modified version of the Japanese Nō drama, in which he uses music, dancing, verse and action so that the beauties of each are complimentary and harmonious. His *Four Plays*, written in this medium, is perhaps the most remarkable achievement of poetic drama in this century. These plays are, however, intended for very small audiences and they are quite impossible for amateurs or for ordinarily gifted theatrical companies to perform, since their production calls for a miming dancer, trained in the artistic traditions of the East.

Sturge Moore, with his *Psyche in Hades* and his *Medea*, the first a mystery play, the second a play in the Nō tradition, has written plays of great beauty and intellectual distinction which could be performed by discriminating amateurs, but he again is deliberately writing for the small, æsthetically educated audience.

Gordon Bottomley, with less genius than either of these poets, makes a wider appeal, with his modern version of Scotch romantic legends, since they have found popularity with dramatic societies, and they need neither dancers nor musicians. All these poets, however, recognize that the sphere of poetic drama in their opinion is no longer in the commercial theatre. To Yeats, at least, poetic drama of true æsthetic value, the drama of the future which has left its crudities behind, its flamboyant youth, must be written for the small picked audience. For Yeats this is so because poetic drama is to him a harmony of the rhythm of speech, of the voice, of instruments, of the body, a harmony so close and intimate that it can only pass through to the mind of the lover of beauty in a small theatre, or, better still, in a room in which none of the old associations of a theatre are aroused.

The question arises whether poetic drama in the future must inevitably be banished from the commercial theatre, and have as its audience only the æsthetically educated few. As in times past poetic drama to have popular appeal must have brilliant scenic attractions, star acting, excitement of action or exuberant romantic appeal. Only one play in the twentieth century has these qualities and yet is modern in

feeling and not a survival of the sentimental tradition of the past. This play, *Hassan*, brilliant, showy, uneven, though it stands alone and could not be imitated, shows that a poetic play can still appear in the theatre with success and may appear in the future, but only with the help of the lavish and popular producer, the Cochran and Reinhardt of times to come.

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